



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 30

(28 April 2008 to 25 May 2008)

BELFAST: THE STATIONERY OFFICE LTD

£70.00

© Copyright 2009

ISBN 978-0-339-80028-1

ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

Adams, Gerry (West Belfast)	McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)	McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
Armstrong, Billy (Mid Ulster)	McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)	McClarty, David (East Londonderry)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)	McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)	McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)	McCrea, Dr William (South Antrim)
Bradley, Mrs Mary (Foyle)	McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (South Belfast)
Bradley, P J (South Down)	McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)	McFarland, Alan (North Down)
Bresland, Allan (West Tyrone)	McGill, Mrs Claire (West Tyrone)
Brolly, Francie (East Londonderry)	McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)
Browne, The Lord (East Belfast)	McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)	McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)
Burns, Thomas (South Antrim)	McHugh, Gerry (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Burnside, David (South Antrim)	McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
Butler, Paul (Lagan Valley)	McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)	McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)	McNarry, David (Strangford)
Clarke, Willie (South Down)	McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)
Cobain, Fred (North Belfast)	Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)
Coulter, Rev Dr Robert (North Antrim)	Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)	Maskey, Paul (West Belfast)
Cree, Leslie (North Down)	Molloy, Francie (Mid Ulster)
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)	Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Deeny, Dr Kieran (West Tyrone)	Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)
Dodds, Nigel (North Belfast)	Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)	Neeson, Sean (East Antrim)
Donaldson, Jeffrey (Lagan Valley)	Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)	Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
Easton, Alex (North Down)	O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)	O'Loan, Declan (North Antrim)
Empey, Sir Reg (East Belfast)	O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Farry, Dr Stephen (North Down)	Paisley, Rev Dr Ian (North Antrim)
Ford, David (South Antrim)	Paisley Jnr, Ian (North Antrim)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)	Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Gallagher, Tommy (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)	Purvis, Ms Dawn (East Belfast)
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)	Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)	Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)	Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
Hanna, Mrs Carmel (South Belfast)	Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Hay, William (Speaker)	Robinson, Mrs Iris (Strangford)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)	Robinson, Ken (East Antrim)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)	Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)	Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)	Ruane, Ms Caitriona (South Down)
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)	Savage, George (Upper Bann)
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)	Shannon, Jim (Strangford)
Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)	Simpson, David (Upper Bann)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)	Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
McCallister, John (South Down)	Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)	Weir, Peter (North Down)
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)	Wells, Jim (South Down)
	Wilson, Brian (North Down)
	Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>Speaker</i>	Mr William Hay MLA
<i>Deputy Speakers</i>	Mr John Dallat MLA Mr David McClarty MLA Mr Francie Molloy MLA
<i>Office of the Speaker</i>	
<i>Adviser to the Speaker</i>	Mr Richard Good
<i>Clerk to the Assembly (Acting)</i>	Mrs Carol Devon
<i>Director of Legal Services (Acting)</i>	Mr Hugh Widdis
<i>Examiner of Statutory Rules</i>	Mr Gordon Nabney
<i>Editor of Debates</i>	Mr Simon Burrowes
<i>Clerk Assistant</i>	Ms Nuala Dunwoody
<i>Director of Research and Information (Acting)</i>	Mr Michael Rickard
<i>Keeper of the House (Acting)</i>	Mrs Sheila McClelland
<i>Principal Clerks</i>	Mrs Debbie Pritchard Mr John Torney Mr Martin Wilson
<i>Clerk to the Assembly Commission</i>	Mr Tony Logue

MINISTERIAL OFFICES

The Executive Committee

<i>First Minister</i>	Rev Dr Ian Paisley
<i>Deputy First Minister</i>	Mr Martin McGuinness
<i>Minister for Employment and Learning</i>	Sir Reg Empey
<i>Minister for Regional Development</i>	Mr Conor Murphy
<i>Minister for Social Development</i>	Ms Margaret Ritchie
<i>Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development</i>	Ms Michelle Gildernew
<i>Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure</i>	Mr Edwin Poots
<i>Minister of Education</i>	Ms Caitríona Ruane
<i>Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment</i>	Mr Nigel Dodds
<i>Minister of the Environment</i>	Mrs Arlene Foster
<i>Minister of Finance and Personnel</i>	Mr Peter Robinson
<i>Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety</i>	Mr Michael McGimpsey

Junior Ministers

<i>Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister</i>	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
	Mr Gerry Kelly

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 28 April 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Ross: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Wednesday, a BBC television crew recorded part of the meeting of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which took place in Room 135, and this, along with an interview with the Chairperson of the Committee, which was conducted in her Stormont office, was broadcast on the 'Politics Show' yesterday. During the Committee meeting, I asked the Chairperson whether she had sought permission from the Commission, and she said that she had, although it is my understanding that the Commission neither granted permission, nor was permission sought from the Commission, for recordings to take place in Committee Room 135 or in the Chairperson's office. Will you advise whether you personally granted permission for that to happen; and, if not, will you investigate why this matter was not brought before the Commission?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I will come back to the Member on this issue in writing or in a response to the House.

Mr Burnside: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When I raised a point of order last week that the Assembly should convey congratulations to Her Majesty The Queen on her eighty-second birthday, you were good enough to say that the point was well made and that you would consult your colleagues. Will you tell me the outcome of that consultation, if it has taken place?

Mr Speaker: I have some sympathy with the Member, but if he feels that he wants to submit a motion to the House on the issue, he can do so. There are other avenues that he can go down, too. I am sure that the matter could be raised with his Whip on the Business Committee. There are a number of ways that the Member can follow through on the issue raised in his point of order.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement regarding the way ahead for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Members are aware, the sea fishing industry in the North is a relatively small but significant sector of the local economy. Although the value of landings by local boats in 2007 was some £21 million, the fleet and the local processing sector make an important contribution to the economic and social fabric of coastal communities, particularly in County Down. My objective is to help the industry to achieve a profitable future while ensuring that stocks are fished in a sustainable manner.

I readily accept that the industry faces considerable challenges. The sector is heavily dependent on prawn fishing, with more than 90% of the fleet's vessels targeting prawns as the main catch.

Although scientists are advising that the stock is being fished sustainably, the situation has been helped by the fact that in recent years a significant number of vessels have switched to fishing in the North Sea for part of the year. This year, that diversion of fishing may not take place, which will increase the number of vessels that are targeting prawns in the Irish Sea.

As white-fish stocks, particularly cod, have declined, that part of the fishing fleet has also declined, to the extent that only a handful of boats are targeting white fish as their main catch. Although there are signs of improvement in haddock and herring quotas, there is some way to go before we can hope to rebuild those to former levels.

The state of the fish stocks is only one part of the equation. As quota allocations have changed during recent years, the industry has been limited in the number of days that it can fish because of efforts to rebuild cod stocks. Furthermore, market prices for many species have not always reflected the cost of catching them. Most significantly, operating costs have risen, principally due to higher fuel prices, with a dramatic surge in fuel costs during the past year. As many Members will appreciate, the fisheries sector is not unique in facing ever-increasing input costs. Many other sectors of the agrifood industry and the wider economy face similar pressures. However, there are positive signs. There is a buoyant and growing market for seafood, both locally and throughout key export markets.

The time is appropriate for all key stakeholders in the industry, including the Department, to work together to deal with the economic difficulties facing the industry and develop a long-term strategic approach to achieve a profitable and sustainable future. I want to build a consensus on how to achieve the maximum return for each ton of fish that is landed; how to deal with fragmentation and lack of probability in the sector; how to develop management approaches that reflect local needs while complying with EU regulations, and how to build an improved and productive relationship among the industry, fishery scientists, managers and other stakeholders.

I accept that that will not be a straightforward process. There is no easy way out of the difficulties facing the fishing industry. In that regard, I applaud the initiative of the Anglo-North Irish Sea Fish Producers' Organisation in developing a marketing role which has helped to reduce sales costs and increase returns to its members. I also applaud the initiative that that organisation and other fishermen have shown to bring about improvements in quality and focus on direct sales to new markets. There has also been a welcome initiative by the Trawlmen's Trading Company to buy bulk fuel and achieve small, but significant, savings for its members.

Together we must ensure that a framework is created to enable the industry to make the changes necessary to adjust to new circumstances and achieve long-term sustainability and prosperity. To help to bring about that change, I have asked my officials to set up a new fisheries forum in which key stakeholders and the Department can work together to develop a strategic plan to address long-term issues, some of which I have highlighted. Through that forum, we can work together to create the right conditions to encourage new entrants to the industry and allow sound business decisions to be made about investment in new boats and equipment.

I want to see a fishing fleet operating more efficiently and less vulnerable to changing market conditions — a fleet that operates in an environmentally sustainable manner and which places greater emphasis on product quality. To help underpin that long-term approach, I have asked my officials to urgently update work that was undertaken several years ago to assess the likely state of the fleet at 2013. That work should help to inform the debate about catching capacity, resource availability and the possible need for restructuring.

I am also committed to undertaking an analysis of the modernisation needs of the fleet in order to prioritise and target the £25 million of support that is available under the European fisheries fund (EFF), which is on top of £27 million that has been paid out under the Financial Instruments for Fisheries Guidance (FIG)

and £6 million that is available to the fishing villages' task force.

I want to ensure that the EFF funding is used strategically to achieve a profitable future for the sector. The operational programme for the EFF has been developed by the four fisheries administrations and will be submitted shortly to the European Commission. It must be approved by the Commission before the scheme can be formally launched.

In the interim period, the operational programme will be the subject of formal discussion with the EU Commission, which will be informed by responses to the consultation that will be launched nationally on 2 May.

As soon as the operational programme is approved, which we anticipate will take place this summer, my Department will ensure that procedures are in place to receive applications. My officials will soon publish an investment plan for consultation. That plan will set out proposals for spending priorities under EFF. That will happen at the same time as the consultation on the operational programme. Our objective is to have the fund open for applications within three months of EU approval of the operational programme.

I wish to address the question of assistance for fuel costs. I raised that issue with Commissioner Borg when I met him on 1 April. He said that he was aware of the Spanish and French aid schemes. His view was that the Spanish scheme, which provides payments to fishermen, appeared to fall within the state-aid *de minimis* provisions. Commissioner Borg's directorate is still assessing the aid that has been notified by France. He made it clear that he favoured a longer-term approach to tackling the economic difficulties that fishing industries face.

I have been called on to make a payment to fishermen under the *de minimis* state-aid arrangements. Indeed, I received a letter on that matter from the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development this morning. To use the provision to its maximum extent would cost approximately £1 million per year — a substantial sum of money that I could justifiably invest only if it were to yield significant lasting benefits. Having carefully considered that option and discussed it with my Executive colleagues, I have decided that it is more appropriate to focus on a longer-term strategic plan, which I outlined earlier, to address the difficulties that are being experienced by the industry.

As part of that longer-term approach, I want to see a focus on improving fuel efficiency in the fleet, using EFF when appropriate. There is no one solution that will be the answer for all vessels in a fleet. However, there is a body of technical assessment and research on possible fuel-efficiency measures, and barriers to their

uptake. I want to see every opportunity explored to take advantage of that work.

Pending the introduction of the EFF programme later this year, I have asked my officials to explore the scope for using the existing FIFG scheme to provide assistance for specific capital investment where that can be justified. Some fishermen have suggested that the use of regulators on engines can help to improve fuel efficiency. I understand that, elsewhere, fuel-flow meters have enabled skippers to save on fuel costs. Those types of initiatives can be introduced quickly. I am prepared to help the industry with the compliance costs that are associated with the operation of the vessel monitoring system (VMS). When the meters were first installed in 2005, Government agreed to meet the cost of installation and initial warranty to help to build a better culture of compliance. I will provide funding to meet the cost of the warranty for a further two years and to meet the transmission costs that each vessel owner has to pay when the vessel is tracked by satellite monitor. That will be worth some £100,000 to the industry over two years, and I am also interested in extending VMS to other parts of the fleet to improve the management capacity of fisheries.

I am also aware that there have been delays in introducing changes to the administrative rules for vessel licensing that were recommended some time ago by an industry-led licensing review working group, which had proposed to introduce those changes across all regions simultaneously. However, Scotland and England are rethinking some aspects of licensing. Since vessel licensing is a devolved matter, I intend to introduce the changes that were proposed by the review group, which had been previously agreed by fisheries organisations, at the earliest opportunity. That will mean that fishermen who are planning to invest in new vessels can benefit from more flexible licensing rules.

One of the other issues that the industry has raised is the days-at-sea regime. As I indicated when I reported to the Assembly on the outcome of the December EU Fisheries Council, although there was a reduction in the headline figure, some flexibilities were secured in the way in which the regime could be operated. I have decided, in principle, that the Department should use the flexibilities and introduce a kilowatt-day system. Under that arrangement, vessels will be able to fish the same number of days as was available to them in 2007, provided that they follow agreed measures to protect fish stocks and enhance gear selectivity. That will provide more flexibility to vessel owners and skippers in determining their pattern of fishing. I am also prepared to examine the possibility of operating the system on a kilowatt-hour basis, as has been the case in Scotland. That will be subject to the European Commission's finding that approach acceptable.

12.15 pm

Go raibh míle maith agat. I am firmly convinced that the way forward for the fishing industry is through a more cohesive approach within the industry, and between the industry and the Executive. That is essential if the problems that the industry faces are to be effectively addressed and to enable it to achieve a stable and profitable long-term future. I want all the stakeholders to come together with the Department to develop a strategic plan with clear objectives that will allow us to maximise the impact of the funding that is available under the European Fisheries Fund. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Dr W McCrea): In the light of the Minister's disappointing statement, I have some questions for her. Although countries such as Spain and France are seeking and endeavouring to aid their crippled fishing industry, our Department has decided to do nothing. Given that, as Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I took part in a useful meeting between the fishing industry and senior departmental officials, I find that disappointing.

The Minister described her statement as being the way ahead for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. I fear that that sounds the death knell for that proud industry because, although forums and strategies sound admirable on paper, the industry will not be around to enjoy the fruits of its long and hard labours. If the Minister wants to know the likely state of the fleet in 2013, she does not need a forum. I can tell her now that it will most probably be rotting at the harbours of once vibrant communities.

The Minister said that she will provide funding to meet the cost of warranty on vessel monitoring systems for a further two years. On current prices, that equates to £276 a vessel a year. Perhaps the Minister will tell the House and the industry how those vessels should spend that 76p a day. All Members share the concerns of other sectors that face the fuel crisis, but Europe demands that participants in the fishing industry tie up their boats, and they are not allowed to fish; no other industry is refused the right to operate.

Why has the Minister ruled out the *de minimis* option, for which the Committee unanimously asked, particularly given the fact that the Spanish Government are implementing it within the rules? The emphasis for the decision on that seems to have come from certain officials and representatives from her party and the Department. On what date did she present the business case to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for the *de minimis* option? I am led to believe that the Minister never presented a business case; her refusal to do that is horrifying to the industry. I ask the

Minister to go back to her Executive colleagues, not to inform them about her decision but to demand and request that an active presentation of a business case be made to gain the necessary finances.

I find it disgraceful that the Minister says that she does not have the money when she has not been to the Department of Finance and Personnel. She had £4.5 million waiting to spend on the development of the Forkhill army base. She was happy to spend money on that but will do nothing to help a crippled industry that is on its knees. The Minister's presentation to the Assembly is despicable, and I demand that she goes back to the Executive and presents a proper business case for the de minimis proposal and for the finances to be given to the ailing fishing industry.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I discussed that issue with my Executive colleagues at last week's meeting. The crux of the issue is not the availability of funding but the justification for it. Public money is at question and — as the Chairperson of the Committee is aware — many other sectors such as the pig industry and the poultry industry face increased input costs. High fuel prices are not a temporary factor, so it is more appropriate to focus on the longer, rather than the shorter, term.

Last week, when I put that proposal to my Executive colleagues, there were no contrary opinions. I am also disappointed that the Chairman — who is well informed about the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) budgets and the pressures that we face — appears not to know that the money sought for the Forkhill project was not secured. Consequently, we do not have £4 million that we do not know what to do with floating around.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: The business case was not presented.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The business case was put to DFP, and it did not stack up. It is not necessary to present a case to DFP if it is of a size where the Department can decide. There must be a long-term solution to the pressures and difficulties facing the fishing industry.

Mr Speaker: When Committee Chairpersons ask questions of Ministers, I allow some latitude; however, I expect Members just to ask questions, rather than adding their own statements to that which they have already heard.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that when she met EU Commissioner Joe Borg he made it clear that he favours a long-term approach to tackling the economic difficulties that the fishing

industry undoubtedly faces. Will the Minister outline what she expects the strategic plan to cover? Furthermore, is improving fuel efficiency a realistic option?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That will be a matter for the group responsible for developing the strategic plan. However, I want that group to focus its recommendations on actions that we might take to secure a viable long-term future for the industry, including the fleet's future size and shape, the likely availability of resources, how fish and fish products should be marketed, and fuel efficiency.

Improving fuel efficiency is a realistic option for the fleet, and that is why I want European fisheries fund money to be used to assist fishermen in taking steps to improve fuel efficiency. The Sea Fish Industry Authority has produced several reports indicating that fishermen can clearly benefit from adopting measures that suit their circumstances and, although there is not a one-size-fits-all solution for every member of the fleet, we must explore every available option in order to improve fuel efficiency.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Throughout the Minister's answer, a loud conversation was going on on the opposite side of the House. Will you make a ruling to bring that conversation to an end?

Mr Speaker: Order. If Members wish to speak to each other, they should be as quiet as possible.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister confirm whether the fishing industry recently presented a three-point plan to her and her Department and whether one of those proposals was to suspend harbour dues for a year, which would amount to approximately £500,000, rather than the £1 million indicated in her statement? Furthermore, does she accept that her statement may prove to be disastrous for Northern Ireland's fishing industry?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have carefully considered the fishing industry's suggestions, and I frequently engage with its representatives. Obviously, therefore, I have carefully considered its calls to offset Fishery Harbour Authority charges. However, in order to address all the difficulties being experienced by the industry, we must focus on a long-term strategic plan. The measures that I announced today — payments for the cost of vessel monitoring, a more flexible days-at-sea regime, and the use of existing funding for fuel-saving technology — will provide welcome assistance now.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for her statement. However, there will be no celebrations in south Down tonight on the back of it.

The Minister plans to establish a fisheries forum, but what more is there to establish? In the past 12 months, there have been as many discussions with the

industry's leaders as it is possible to have. Alan McCulla, Dick James and representatives from the Trawlermen's Trading Company have all visited the Minister.

Surely, the Minister has heard all the problems that exist — there are no more problems to find. Instead of establishing a time-delaying forum that will drag on, why does the Minister not analyse the existing problems and examine what has happened in the past 12 months?

The vessel monitoring system is another spy in the sky, despite the Minister saying that it helps to build "a better culture of compliance". Those are nice words, but the £100,000 on offer work out at less than £20 per month to boat owners — what is the value of that?

The European fisheries fund will be introduced at the end of the year, which is eight or nine months away. There is a downward trend in the industry and many trawlermen could go out of business in that time. Does the Minister have any plans to provide financial assistance in the short term?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I will answer the Member's last question first. The short-term assistance that we are providing will help fishermen improve fuel efficiency and spend less on fuel.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development gave much of its attention to the McKenzie Report, which was published last year and examined the issues on the red-meat strategy and whether — and, if so, how — it had a future in the long term. That is where the fishing industry has missed out: there have been debates between fishing industry representatives and others, but we must sit down and explore honestly the problems and challenges that the fishing industry faces and find solutions. That has not happened, so we want to ensure that the stakeholders sit down and agree on solutions. That is a short-term project; the forum should be wound up by the autumn and will make recommendations to us. We want a situation in which the fishing industry appraises honestly where it is, where it needs to go and where it is likely to be. A short-term solution to that will not help to achieve a long-term strategy that enables the fishing industry to stay in business.

The European Commission will approve the operational programme in July 2008. The Department plans to have the fund open to applications within three months of receiving that approval. Over the summer, my Department will work with the fishing industry to help applicants formulate proposals. It is likely that the first applications will be processed and approved by the selection panel before the end of the year. We understand the need to get that money out as quickly as possible; our officials are working flat out to ensure that that happens. The stakeholders in the fishing industry must join together to formulate a

long-term plan that ensures that our fishing industry survives well into this century.

Mr McCarthy: I am disappointed by the Minister's statement and her last answer. Fishermen, who are fed up sitting around tables discussing, planning and plotting, are being asked to continue doing that. Representatives of the fishing industry visited Parliament Buildings in March 2008 and said that they are on their knees — the fishing industry is dying. The Minister knows that, but the industry is still being asked to hold on. In her statement, the Minister mentioned a lack of efficiencies — she is almost saying that the fishermen are not doing what they ought to be doing.

Mr Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr McCarthy: Yes; I have three questions. Northern Irish fishermen are forced to pay a stealth tax — light dues — from which their counterparts in other parts of Europe, including the Republic of Ireland, are exempt. Will the Minister help our fishermen in that respect?

Local fishermen now pay for the maintenance of satellite monitoring equipment, which is an enforcement tool used by the Department. Can assistance not be provided on that front?

For consecutive years, local fishermen have had to endure above-inflation increases for changes imposed at Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie by the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority (NIFHA). There are measures that the Minister and her Department can take to help fishermen to survive if the will exists to do so. Will the Minister help the fishing industry now, before it is too late?

12.30pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Light dues are a matter for the Department for Transport in London. I am aware that approaches were made some years ago to what was previously known as the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) to abolish light dues for the fishing industry. However, DETR declined, insisting that the user should pay and that favouring any one sector over another would be discriminatory. The North's vessels contribute around £50,000 a year in light dues, and at current rates, a 15-metre vessel pays £290 a year and a 24-metre vessel pays £470 a year. Our intelligence is that the Department for Transport is unlikely to change its position on the matter. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In the South, light dues are funded through general taxation. In the North, they are not a devolved matter, and the policy of the Department for

Transport is that they should continue to be paid by commercial fishermen.

The Fisheries Harbour Authority sets uniform dues and charges for the vessels at the three local fishing harbours that the Member named. Over the past three years, landing dues — which form the largest component of the charges that are paid by active vessels — have not increased, remaining at 2.75% of the value of fish that are landed. Increases in dues for berthing, slipping and ice sales have risen to ensure that NIFHA can deliver a good service to the local fishing fleet at all three harbours. However, the charges remain in line with those of the other harbours that are used by local fishing vessels.

Mr Wells: What possible consolation is it to a fisherman who is paying £4,500 a week in fuel for the Minister to offer him 76p a day? It is not a case of the two proposals being mutually exclusive: the Minister could still have her fisherman's forum and plan a more sustainable future. However, there is absolutely nothing to stop her combining that with immediate de minimis aid.

It is good enough for the Spanish, who have approval from the European Union Fisheries Commissioner to receive that aid, so why can she not bring some consolation to the local fishing industry at a time when it is experiencing enormous difficulties? If the Minister dithers much longer, there will not be a fishing fleet for the forum to discuss. She must act now, or the fishing fleet of the Province will be decimated on her watch.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Spanish Government have opted to pay de minimis aid to their fishing industry, reportedly to maintain industry competitiveness. To use the provision to the maximum extent here would cost approximately £1 million a year. Having considered that option carefully, I have decided that it is more appropriate to focus on the longer-term strategic plan that I have already outlined to address the difficulties that are experienced by the fishing industry.

I would love to be able to help everybody who is struggling to make a living through either farming, fishing or through other industries. However, I am the Minister, and it is my job to balance the payments that we make from the DARD budget in order to maximise the benefit to everybody who comes under our remit. I sympathise with the fishermen, and they have told me before that sympathy does not work. However, to grant de minimis aid would have repercussions that do not stack up. Therefore, I believe that a long-term solution is needed in order to sustain the industry.

In my view, granting de minimis aid is similar to putting a sticking plaster over something that is potentially more damaging to the fishing industry than the high cost of fuel. That high cost is not likely to go

away, and it is something that we will all have to learn to live with — householders, haulage firms and fishermen. It is not in my gift to make money available when I know that other sectors are facing high input costs and are in as delicate and vulnerable a situation as the fishing industry.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I know that there is very little that she can do to resolve the problems that are largely the making of the European Union. Furthermore, those advocates of the European Union over the years should have seen a lot of this coming.

Who will be involved in the fisherman's forum once it has been set up? How can fishermen and others become involved? Also, what findings does the Minister expect the forum to return with, and how soon does she think a report could be delivered?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: All stakeholders in the fisheries sector will be included. I want all representatives from the main fishermen's organisations, environmental organisations, the inshore fisheries sector, scientists, processors and my officials to work better together on this issue. I hope that the group will be established fairly soon and that it will produce a report by the autumn. I would like there to be broad agreement on a strategic plan by the time the EFF is open for applications — I expect that that will be at the end of October, subject to the approval of the operational plan by the European Commission.

Mr Irwin: The Minister stated today that fishermen could cut back on fuel costs. I am sure that they could if they kept their vessels docked in the harbours. I will ask the Minister a question that she has already been asked on several occasions — I am asking it again because she has ducked the question in the past. What is the Minister doing to help the fishing industry now?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am gratified that William thinks that he has the determination to extract something out of me that others before him have not been able to extract. We have gone over this matter many times before; in my submission to the Assembly today, and in the questions and discussions on vessel monitoring systems, fuel regulators and the creation of a plan that will honestly look at the future of the industry. We are engaged in all of that activity. We will do everything in our power to help the industry to become viable and sustainable in the long term.

Mr Burnside: The Minister knows that, because of the European quota system, revenue for our fishermen is completely flat. The only way in which the Minister can deal with the problem is by addressing costs. Like everyone else, I ask her to look again at the £1 million

cost of introducing de minimis aid arrangements. The only way that costs can be reduced is through a fuel subsidy. If she were to go back to the Finance Minister and put the matter back on the Executive's agenda, I believe that she would have cross-community support for it. If the fishing industry goes, it will never come back. Until we get rid of the European fisheries policy as a policy for the whole of the European Union that affects the United Kingdom, fishermen in this Province will not be secure.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I have already said, I discussed the issue of de minimis aid with my Executive colleagues at last week's meeting. The crux of the matter is not the availability of the aid but the justification for it. Fishermen already enjoy a rebate — they pay 10p per litre less than others for red diesel that is available to farmers. Therefore, there is already an acceptance of the pressures that high fuel costs place on fishing fleets, and there has been an attempt to try to minimise the impact of those costs. Many other sectors face increased input costs — high fuel costs do not affect the fishing industry alone. We must take a long-term, sensible and pragmatic view of this matter. As an Executive, we must spend public money as best we can. We must find the best way forward and, ultimately, the price of fish needs to be reflected in the catch costs, which are still not quite what they should be. As Minister, I am unable to intervene in the marketplace, but the price of the fish that are caught must rise to meet the challenges of fuel costs.

Mr Shannon: I am sure that the Minister is well aware that the fishing industry is probably the most over-policed industry in Northern Ireland — already there are satellites, eyes in the sky, Royal Navy fishing boats, fishing division boats and a harbour full of departmental officials standing ready to count and check the fish. It seems that the sector has more people keeping an eye on it than any other.

When did the Minister present the business case for de minimis aid to the Executive, and what was the outcome? Will she ask the Executive for that assistance again? Why does the Minister feel that the de minimis scheme arrangements cannot be introduced? Everyone in the Chamber is well aware of the need for such a scheme and of the benefits that it would bring. In her statement, the Minister confirmed that it would cost £1 million to introduce the scheme. From talking to those in the fishing industry, my understanding is that the cost will be closer to £700,000.

The £30,000 to help maintain fishing vessels' satellite equipment is welcome. However, that amounts to 76p per boat — about the price of a packet of Fisherman's Friend lozenges. In the same way that people either like or loathe Fisherman's Friends, the grant gives neither comfort nor succour to the fishing industry.

Will the Minister explain why she does not follow the example of France and Spain by using the de minimis scheme as they do? The Minister has that power. She does not need permission to do her job from either Westminster or the Assembly.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member and I have held many discussions over the past eight or nine months on challenges that face the Northern Ireland fishing industry. I know how hard he works for — and how dedicated he is to — the sector. Mr Shannon has repeated some questions that have already been asked by other Members.

I brought the issue of whether a business case was needed to the Executive last week. None of my ministerial colleagues contradicted my view that bringing a business case was bound to fail.

Mr Shannon raised the issues of scientific evidence and monitoring. There is an absolute need for advice from scientists ahead of negotiations in December's EU Fisheries Council. That advice will help industry and the Department to make the case for Northern Ireland quotas. Scientific advice was instrumental in transforming a 15% cut in Northern Ireland's herring quota into a 5% increase. Scientific evidence on prawn burrows in the Irish Sea enabled us last year to achieve a rollover on the prawn quota. The Commission is concerned that the by-catch of cod by the prawn sector is a difficulty, and that is a matter on which hard negotiating is continuing.

Environmental issues also come into play, but there is no doubt that scientific evidence helps to make a strong case for increasing rather than decreasing quotas. It also provides fishermen with the best possible opportunity to land a big enough catch to stay in business.

However, the business case is not likely to stack up or to get through the Executive. I had a good discussion about that with the rest of the Executive on Thursday. We must find a more strategic way to help the fishing industry to stay in business.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister's statement is disappointing and potentially disastrous for the very fragile fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

The Minister should know that there may be no long-term future for the industry, because it will go down the drain unless the short-term assistance that is being called for by many Members is made available. Will the Minister confirm to the House that, contrary to what she perhaps intimated to my colleague Mr Shannon earlier, she did not actually present a business case to the Executive or to the Department of Finance and Personnel?

Will she heed calls that are coming from Members and directly from the industry itself, and go back to the

Executive? The need for a long-term strategy is acknowledged, but the fishing industry also needs a short-term boost through the de minimis scheme.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I did not say at any point that I had presented a business case. I said that the business case would not stack up, that I had discussed it on Thursday at the Executive meeting, and that colleagues there had presented no contrary views. We discussed the pressures that face the fishing industry, and no one advised me to put forward a business case.

I have to consider the available resources, and we have to work as an Executive. There are reasons why the business case will not stack up, and I have answered that question a number of times. The business case is for £1 million — the £100,000 is for the vessel monitoring system.

12.45 pm

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Ad Hoc Committee: Local Postal Services

Motion made:

That, as provided for in Standing Order 48(7), this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider, and make proposals for, partnerships that could enhance the economic case for viable local postal services, in accordance with its resolution of 21 April 2008; and to submit a report to the Assembly by 2 June 2008.

Composition:

DUP	4
Sinn Féin	3
UUP	2
SDLP	2
Alliance	1

Quorum: The quorum shall be five Members.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee may determine.

— [Mr McNarry]

[Mr P J Bradley]

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 31(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 31(2) be extended to 27 June 2008, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill (NIA 11/07).

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill was introduced to the Assembly on 22 October 2007, and was given its Second Stage on 4 March 2008. It was referred to the Committee for Finance and Personnel on 5 March 2008. The Bill contains 17 clauses and one schedule.

The Bill refines the powers, duties and rights of Departments, district councils that enforce the regulations, and applicants. It extends the general principles of the primary legislation to include protection of the environment and promotion of sustainable development. Therefore, the Bill is important, as it not only updates and streamlines existing regulatory and enforcement provisions, but its provisions reflect the increasing significance of energy conservation, sustainability and environmental protection.

My Committee placed a public notice in the main provincial newspapers on 5 March 2008 to advertise

the Committee Stage of the Bill and to invite written evidence. The Committee also contacted key stakeholders who had responded to the Department's earlier consultations on the policy proposals to which the Bill will give effect.

The Committee has taken oral evidence from a range of key stakeholders, including Building Control Northern Ireland; the Building Regulations Advisory Committee; Climate Change Coalition Northern Ireland; the Sustainable Energy Association; the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists; the Chartered Institute of Building in Ireland; the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in Northern Ireland; the Association of Building Engineers; the Northern Ireland branch of the Institution of Structural Engineers; and the Department of Finance and Personnel officials who worked on the Bill.

The Committee also received a range of written submissions in response to its public consultation. In the coming weeks, the Committee also plans to take evidence from representatives from the South of Ireland and from England and Wales on their experience in implementing similar legislative reforms. Evidence sessions have also been scheduled with the Energy Savings Trust and with the Northern Ireland Environment Link.

Although the provisions of the Bill have generally been welcomed, some stakeholders have suggested specific amendments and proposals. The Committee will need additional time to consult with the Department on those potential amendments and to consider its final position. Therefore, I am seeking an extension to 27 June 2008, to permit the Committee sufficient time to reach a considered position and to report to the Assembly. I ask Members for their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 31(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 31(2) be extended to 27 June 2008, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill (NIA 11/07).

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Review of Business Bureaucracy

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the burden, in terms of time and money, placed upon business in the past by unnecessary bureaucracy, out-of-date regulations and the "gold plating" of EU legislation; and calls upon the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to investigate the potential for a widespread review of business bureaucracy in Northern Ireland, with the aim of simplifying and consolidating necessary regulation and eliminating that which is no longer required.

My colleagues and I tabled the motion because we are extremely sensitive to the continual clarion calls from the business community about the negative impact of business bureaucracy on its ability to operate profitable enterprises.

Since restoration, we have been struck by the volume of subordinate legislation — which places obligations on businesses — passed by the Assembly. Some people have, wrongly, criticised the Assembly for not passing enough legislation in its first year. As Members know, passing primary legislation is a laborious process. However, countless pieces of subordinate law are passed by the Assembly — sometimes without a word being said. Although individual regulations may not particularly burden businesses, the accumulation of regulations can do so. Northern Ireland's business regulations amount to several thousand pages — and are continually increasing.

Not all regulation is negative. No element of regulation escapes criticism, but everyone will agree that employment, health and safety and environmental regulations are essential in order to ensure the quality of products for the consumer and to maintain a level playing field. The motion does not aim to eradicate all regulation; it aims to build a better regulatory environment, simplify and consolidate required regulation, and eliminate unnecessary regulation.

Those of us in touch with the business community know that red tape places burdens on time, money and, occasionally, foregone investment. Business owners invariably say that red tape and regulation prevents them from doing the job that they want to do, and they are exasperated by burgeoning business bureaucracy.

That sense of mounting pressure is heightened in Northern Ireland because of the well-documented domination of our economy by small to medium-sized

companies. If a company has only a handful of employees and no in-house expertise in the areas affected by regulation, it is largely left to the business owner — who must already juggle finance, wages, human resources and marketing responsibilities — to deal with the raft of regulation. Reams of red tape can discourage investment and may, in extreme circumstances where regulations bring additional costs, threaten jobs.

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has approximately 7,000 members in Northern Ireland, and it regularly reports on difficulties caused by red tape and regulation. The FSB's 2006 survey, 'Barriers to Growth', found that over half of small businesses considered regulation a serious barrier to growth. Moreover, 43% of respondents in Northern Ireland wanting to downsize their businesses cited excessive regulation as the reason. Furthermore, 57% of businesses reported an increase in time spent dealing with legislation in the past two years. From that snapshot, it is clear that the burden of bureaucracy and regulation is particularly acute on small businesses and may act as a disincentive.

In a recent survey conducted by the FSB and its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, the Small Firms Association, 27% of small businesses cited rising levels of bureaucracy as one of their three main concerns. At a time when businesses face so many different pressures — as highlighted daily in the media — the plucking out of bureaucracy as a main concern highlights the extent of the problem.

The FSB regularly holds focus groups with local businesses. The people who have to live with this red tape and regulation say that they spend the days conducting their business and the nights at home keeping up with paperwork, or that, because paperwork arrives in dribs and drabs, they wait to accumulate a bundle to complete, which often results in the receipt of reminders — sometimes final reminders. Furthermore, some people claim that the annual business inquiry is so general and vague that they cannot understand its purpose.

The Federation of Small Businesses has estimated that, nationally, directors of small businesses spend more than seven hours a week filling in forms instead of doing what we want them to do — their real jobs. According to the British Chambers of Commerce, the cumulative cost of regulation on British businesses is a staggering £55.6 billion, and it estimates that that figure has risen by some £10 billion in the last year alone.

It is clear that there are genuine deep concerns in the business community about the cost of red tape and regulation and, more particularly, the distraction they cause. Those concerns are shared by Members on all sides of the House and, most importantly, by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and his

Department. I have raised the issue of regulation with the Minister in the Assembly previously, and he is committed to cutting the burden of business bureaucracy. However, it is appreciated that easing the burden of, or eradicating, red tape is not as easy as it sounds, given that more than 50% of it emanates directly for the European Union, and a substantial amount of the remainder comes from HM Treasury. We cannot simply eradicate overnight all the regulation that we might wish.

Although constant vigilance of regulation is always required, I acknowledge the good work that the Department has done recently. The 2006 DETI review of the Northern Ireland better regulation strategy contained many crucial recommendations, including improved communication with the business sector on the matter; a review of all existing legislation and forms, and annual reports of improvements that are made. As a result of that review, regulations imposed by bodies such as Invest Northern Ireland and the Health and Safety Executive have been consolidated or eliminated entirely.

Northern Ireland must apply constant downward pressure on red tape and regulation. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as well as Departments that initiate regulations that affect various aspects and sectors of our economy and businesses, such as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, must constantly review the regulations that they expect business to implement. In so doing, they must be sensitive to small and medium-sized enterprises and cognisant of the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach, in which regulations are sometimes perceived to be tailored to big businesses, does not suit business in Northern Ireland. Where exemptions or alternatives for small businesses exist, they must be seriously explored and implemented.

The case for reducing red tape is simple. Growing a dynamic, vibrant economy is our number-one priority, and we are focusing on encouraging exports and innovation, to name only two elements. Creating a culture of reducing red tape can give indigenous and inward investors a competitive edge, which, for many, can be as attractive as fiscal incentives.

In conclusion, if we want a business climate that is characterised by entrepreneurship, we should ensure that business is held back as little as possible.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr P Maskey): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House today. It follows on from the motion on the construction industry that Sinn Féin sponsored last week, and that is a good, natural progression. Given that that motion was agreed, I sincerely hope that this motion will be supported by all Members today. It will give hope to

businesspeople and industries that the Assembly is here to assist the development of the business community in the hope that it will prosper and move into the future faster and more positively.

One of the most important points expressed in the motion is that the Assembly recognises the burden that bureaucracy places on business. That is crucial, because we must remember that many of our businesspeople are burdened by the amount of bureaucracy that exists; there is simply too much of it, and we do not need it all.

Like other Members, I have met representatives of the business community over many years. We all recognise the burden that is placed on them. They tell us about the pressures that bureaucracy and red tape put on them and stymie enterprises from growing. However, although we recognise that there must be some element of bureaucracy to ensure that businesspeople abide by the rules and regulations, too much of it can have a detrimental effect on the businesses and enterprises.

Most Departments deny that the bureaucracy is excessive. However, if we were to ask the business community about it, we would get a different answer.

1.00 pm

We must get rid of as much unnecessary red tape as possible. Excessive bureaucracy hinders business growth, and saps the business community's precious time and energy. Businesspeople are obliged to complete an incredible amount of paperwork, and the language that is used in those forms is sometimes unreadable. We must ensure that regulation is worded in clear and unambiguous language.

The burden of red tape and gold-plating is holding back the growth of small businesses. Small businesses' continued failure to expand — or their collapse — would have a hugely negative impact on our economy. Many of our businesses will not flourish, or may even go to the wall. The Assembly cannot afford to let that happen and must safeguard economic development.

We must ensure that democracy, and the filling in of forms, is streamlined. Paperwork must be reduced so that our businesses can get on with what they do best — being productive and innovative, and creating employment. We must do all in our power — and provide the easiest systems — to help our businesses to be innovative and creative. We must encourage and foster quality by removing obstacles and sharpening incentives, and by promoting the skills and entrepreneurial spirit that are needed to succeed in world markets.

Sinn Féin supports the motion, and we hope that everyone else will support the motion; it represents an important step. The Assembly should send a clear message to the business community that we are here

for them, and that we want to make matters as easy as possible for them. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: A number of Members who are due to speak are not in the House; we cannot wait for them. Therefore, I will call those Members who are present.

Mr Cree: On behalf of my party, I support the motion, and I thank the Members who were responsible for its appearing on the Order Paper.

Reducing the burden of regulation and reporting on the private sector is a recurrent theme, but it is important, nevertheless. I will not beat about the bush: our economy is not in a happy state. We are over-reliant on the public sector — one third of our workforce is employed by the public sector, which, in turn, accounts for two thirds of our economic activity.

A skills shortage is being alleviated by immigrant workers. Our economic-activity level — the proportion of the working-age population with jobs — is lower than our competitors. The consequent dependence on the proportion of the population who are in work is high: roughly twice that in the Republic of Ireland.

Under direct rule, the public sector became our biggest exporter, attracting roughly double the tax take through subvention from the Treasury. That is changing, as Gershon reforms and Treasury stringency take hold, now that terrorism does not have to be kept at bay, economically or by the security forces.

The protectionist policies that were pursued by direct rule Ministers for 30 years have failed to rescue declining industries. Manufacturing employment has halved to 12.5% of the workforce, but that 12.5% now represents 30% of economic activity. Productivity has increased dramatically. However, that growth has been achieved through the efforts of businesses themselves, and in spite of the relentless imposition of regulation and reporting arrangements by those who do not have to worry about running a competitive business.

The public sector grew under direct rule. However, in the private sector, reasonably paid production jobs have given way to lower-paid service jobs. The Province urgently needs a thriving, knowledge-based private sector that can turn out products and services capable of holding their own in the global marketplace. The private sector also needs to be able to pay higher wages to talented and hard-working employees.

Government must scythe through needless regulations and reporting arrangements that are not legitimately in the public interest. We must play our part in promoting the economic recovery of the Province. We can do that by sharply reducing and simplifying the burden of rules, regulations and reporting restrictions that impair the ability of our export-orientated businesses to compete globally.

Those businesses are especially important because they bring fresh money into Northern Ireland. They form the top end of the monetary food chain that cascades through the economy, in and out of the pockets of consumers and domestic producers.

Our exporters do well: one has only to consider the Wright Group, F G Wilson, Thales Air Defence, Bombardier and many other companies that export most or all of their goods and services, bringing fresh money into the economy. In particular, we owe it to those companies that compete globally to make the impact of the public sector on their costs as light and effective as possible. We want them to prosper and to grow. They are all highly innovative firms — they have to be to survive on the stage of modern international business. We must avoid blunting their productivity through the impact of public-sector rules, regulations and requirements that increase their overhead expenditure and, as a consequence, affects their productivity.

We need to make Northern Ireland the location of preference for the establishment of new businesses, particularly for talented young people who, all too often, leave our shores. A productive private sector provides the wherewithal for provincial and local government to meet all those welfare and infrastructure needs to which we aspire for the people of Northern Ireland. What we do for export businesses, we should also do for businesses supplying our domestic market in order to make the goods and services purchased by the people of Northern Ireland cheaper and thus improve the welfare of all in our Province.

There is a necessary level of regulation and reporting that is recognised by responsible businesses. It provides a level playing field in areas where the public interest should prevail. However, overburdening the private sector will inevitably adversely affect employment and the tax take.

I lay before the Assembly my party's unequivocal support for legitimate business interests, and the UUP intends that Government should play a full and constructive part in enabling businesses to be established and to grow and prosper. The business world creates and distributes wealth: we, in the Chamber, consume it. My party is committed to making the public-sector burden on businesses as light and effective as possible.

Mr Simpson: I accept — and I am sure that the Assembly accepts — that there must be rules and proper accountability. Businesses, however, can be frustrated by the heavy hand of regulation and bureaucracy that dogs business in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Departments are committed to reducing the burdens on business, including any arising from EU directives and regulations. I ask the Minister to investigate fully complaints of that type

that are brought to his attention, with a view to removing as many layers of bureaucracy as possible.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has a responsibility to ensure that all Departments operate good regulatory and enforcement practices in setting and implementing policies on devolved matters. Departments undertake regulatory impact assessments when developing new policies or amending existing ones. They must also estimate the cost to business of proposed regulations, and, within 10 years of the introduction of legislation, decide whether the measure should continue. In theory, those measures should be to the benefit of business.

Mr Burnside: The Member is an experienced businessman. In counting the cost of regulation, one item, which the Minister should address in his summing up, is never brought before the public eye. That is the cost to regular, legal business of the black economy, which is absolutely massive in the Province. It is illegal activity that pays no tax to the Treasury; all the money goes into the hands of criminals. Does the Member agree that the Minister should evaluate the cost of the black economy to Northern Ireland's legal economy?

Mr Simpson: I agree with the Member. The black economy causes major difficulty across the entire Province. It is a subject that should be examined in detail.

I have questions for the Minister. What method does his Department use to check how closely Departments adhere to the measures to which I referred earlier? How effective is the system? What contact does DETI have with business leaders that allows it to ascertain their views? How beneficial — or otherwise — have those measures been for businesses across the Province?

The other question to be asked is whether DETI has identified any improvements that could be made to the current situation.

I want to be fair to the Minister — after all, nobody wants to fall out with the incoming deputy leader of their party; not unless one really has to. He has taken a keen interest in promoting business, and I have spoken to him about issues in my constituency. I have found the Minister to have a real interest in improving Northern Ireland's economy. I commend him for that, and for his work in attracting international investors and encouraging local businesspeople.

If I were to put myself in his shoes, I imagine one of the difficulties that he would have would be in identifying definite examples of businesses that are suffering because of bureaucracy. I can offer him two such examples in my own constituency.

First, there is a major international company that is seeking to locate its UK administration headquarters in

Upper Bann — it is being held back due to delays in gas pipeline installation. The company is ready to proceed; the machinery is ready to be imported; jobs have been identified that can be relocated, yet the company is being held back by an unwieldy, blunt, heavy-handed bureaucratic environment.

Secondly, I have been working with a firm that has bought a 10-acre, fully-serviced site in which it plans to establish a new facility. That will create considerable employment in Lurgan and Portadown, but the firm has been told by Northern Ireland Electricity that the electricity supply that it requires could take up to 12 months to establish.

If we are going to rise to the challenges of competing successfully with the Irish Republic, we have to put competition first. We must adopt the approach of getting things done for business and putting competition to the forefront of our decision-making process.

I do not think that the companies that I have mentioned would want their details tossed back and forth across the House, so I will not go down that road. I ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to look urgently at those particular examples of bureaucracy that are causing delay in creating further employment. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate the proposers of the motion on bringing it to the House. I am pleased to support the motion. I am also grateful for the attendance of the Minister.

It goes without saying that here in the North, we operate in a very difficult and challenging economic environment. I strongly support the commitment in the Programme for Government to develop the local economy. It will be necessary to achieve that if we are to provide a stable and sustainable political and economic future. We have very little autonomy as regards fiscal matters, tax matters and the policy that is laid down by the Treasury in London. That disadvantage is compounded by the economic trade winds of Europe and around the world. However, that does not mean that the Assembly, within its remit, cannot address certain conditions which constrain competitiveness and productivity.

The motion correctly identifies unnecessary bureaucracy and form-filling as particular issues that can, and should, be addressed. The review being advocated — and that will, hopefully, receive all-party endorsement today — will provide an opportunity to identify how modern IT systems and new data-sharing powers allied to responsive and agile Government can be deployed to not only make this a more investment-friendly region but to relieve the pressure on those who are already in business.

That can be achieved by streamlining the interface between Government and business, and it is hoped that the review, under the Minister's leadership, will take that on board. There is an opportunity to develop this region as an exemplar of how to achieve a business-friendly relationship with the Government that will, equally, work to the advantage of the Government.

The challenges that exist to build the economy here require us to demonstrate the differences between ourselves and the locations with which we will be competing for business. This is one such opportunity. I support the motion.

1.15 pm

Mr Shannon: I thank the Members for securing the debate, because it is an issue about which many small businesses are concerned. However, I want to mention a couple of matters before I get into the thrust of the debate. Members are aware of red tape and how it affects farmers. That is another Minister's responsibility, but it illustrates that it is not only small businesses that are affected by red tape; it affects farmers. The Ulster Farmers' Union has long campaigned to change that.

My colleague Simon Hamilton and I met with another Minister — Margaret Ritchie from the Department for Social Development — to discuss the red tape that is involved in benefit entitlement. The system is so entangled and so difficult to understand that, in frustration, people turn to their elected representatives to lobby Ministers for change. There have, therefore, been requests for change in the agriculture sector and the benefit system. There have been problems across the Province in those two industries, and some people have been penalised because of the unnecessary bureaucracy that exists. However, it does not end there.

Small businesses across the Province are left bewildered about their obligations and about how to carry them out. That bewilderment extends to worrying about how to fund the changes when they eventually understand what they are being asked to change.

Small and medium-sized businesses make up over half of the UK's business population, and as such, they are not merely a minority to be overlooked and ignored. However, it is clear that they are at a distinct disadvantage compared to the bigger businesses when it comes to implementing new legislation. The Federation of Small Businesses says that it costs five times more and takes five times longer for a small company to implement new regulations than it does a big business. It is, therefore, clear that small businesses are hampered in a way that the larger companies are not. That is grossly unfair, and it should not be seen simply as how things are.

A survey that was carried out by the Federation of Small Businesses found that two thirds of small firms wanted to grow and expand, but half of them felt that

regulations were a barrier to that growth. That is not difficult to understand when one discovers that complying with regulations and changes costs businesses between £20 billion and £40 billion a year. It was also discovered that 50% of small businesses that sought help in interpreting regulations into language that they could understand and policies that they could implement did not find the help for which they were looking. It is, therefore, no wonder that so many small businesses are fined for not complying with the regulations.

It is difficult for someone to implement and comply with changes when they do not understand what is being asked of them. Some 40% of small businesses said that they needed more guidance, and 54% were confused by the complexities of the material that was sent to them. There is an easy solution: implement only that which is necessary and do so in a way that the ordinary person can understand. I am aware that many Departments have tried to ensure that easy-to-understand guidelines are produced, and I commend that, but there should be a firm rule for all legislation.

I am aware that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is ahead of its target for cutting red tape, and I commend the Minister for that. However, more must be done. The so-called Gershon review-inspired slimming down in the Civil Service focused on fewer tasks for fewer people and on being proactive in simplifying matters. That is the line that we should take. Procedures should be simplified: the unnecessary audits that have put so much strain on small businesses should be cut, and legislation should be reviewed so that the laws, which are not doing their job or which are redundant, should be scrapped.

I ask the Minister to consider the Dutch approach, which has meant the scrapping of one piece of red tape when another is introduced. That comes down to prioritising. The implementation of that Dutch policy and the review of bureaucracy cost £35 million, but it saved up to £16 billion by enforcing only those regulations necessary for growth and by binning the rest. That must be done here.

Mr Weir: Will the Member agree that this would not be the first time that we have had a very successful import from Holland?

Mr Shannon: I agree wholeheartedly. I must express an interest and some bias in that respect. The coming of King William was a special occasion — and he did not have to worry about border controls either.

We can no longer sustain the amount of regulation that comes through; something has to go. It is my preference that a redundant policy that costs money to implement should go, rather than small businesses from our high streets or industrial parks.

As the economic conference draws near, it is vital to show in every way that Northern Ireland is an

investment- and business-friendly place. I urge the Minister to start a review of the process now, thereby showing that we are ready and waiting to encourage and build businesses — both big and small — in the Province. I support the motion.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): I thank everyone who has participated in the debate — it has been short but useful.

The Executive want to create an environment that encourages and enables businesses to continue to expand and contribute to Northern Ireland's economic growth. I am aware that, at times, businesses can feel frustrated by what they see as unnecessary red tape, too much form filling and the perceived heavy hand of Government regulation. However, a modern economy needs rules and accountability, whether to protect the vulnerable or the environment, to promote safety and fairness at work, or to help raise standards of service. The right regulatory environment is essential if businesses are to grow, inward investment is to flow, and our economy is to develop. The Members who have spoken about the need for balance and the right regulatory make-up are absolutely right.

This morning, I attended the Unite trade union headquarters on the Antrim Road where an event was being held to mark international workers' day, with the focus being on the number of deaths at work over the years. I was struck by the fact that during this century so far, 10 million people across the world have died as a result of work-related injuries, incidents, or illnesses. In light of that and the work of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, for example, it is right and proper to say that it is necessary to have a certain amount of regulation in place to prevent death and injury at work.

As several Members have already mentioned, many of the regulations that affect business in Northern Ireland derive from European Union or United Kingdom law. Business representatives consistently indicate that the majority of the regulatory burdens are felt in areas with an EU or a UK legislative base. Therefore, developments in the European Union or in Whitehall are of great importance and relevance to us.

In recent years, the European Commission has been pursuing a better regulation agenda and the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of EU efforts to improve and simplify the regulatory environment. The Commission is committed to simplifying EU legislation and intends to reduce by 25% the administrative burdens that it creates before the end of 2012. That will have significant benefits for Northern Ireland businesses if it is successful. Along with other Members, I look forward to that happening.

Complaints have been made today and in the past about gold-plating — that is, adding to EU requirements

when legislation is being implemented here. It has been said that the United Kingdom, in particular, goes overboard and goes the extra mile when implementing European laws and regulations. The Member for Strangford Mr Shannon mentioned the agriculture sector, and the difference can be seen in our approach to legislation and that of other countries — in particular, several southern European countries. For example, six or seven years after Britain introduced milk quotas, certain countries in southern Europe were still counting their herds. That is, therefore, an issue.

The whole issue has been investigated thoroughly. The 2006 Davidson report suggested that over-implementation is not as widespread in the United Kingdom as is sometimes claimed. The majority of directives are issued on a UK-wide basis, and, because that is the case, Northern Ireland Departments liaise closely with the Whitehall regulators to ensure that any specific Northern Ireland interests are taken into account. In instances in which Northern Ireland Departments are responsible for directly transposing EU regulations, they automatically and stringently adhere to a policy of avoiding unnecessary and inappropriate gold-plating.

I am unaware of any examples of gold-plating of regulations for which the Northern Ireland Executive are responsible. However, if Members have any particular concerns on that issue, I am happy for them to be brought to my attention. I will investigate those to ascertain what can be done.

The UK Government's better-regulation agenda is being pursued actively in Whitehall through various initiatives and proposals that have flowed from the recommendations of two major reports that were published in 2005. Those are the Better Regulation Task Force report, 'Regulation — Less is More', and the Hampton report, 'Reducing administrative burdens: effective inspection and enforcement'. Those reports led to a number of initiatives in Whitehall, including simplification plans, risk-based inspection and enforcement and proposals to make the penalty system more proportionate and effective.

In Northern Ireland, my Department is responsible for ensuring that all Departments across the Executive operate good regulatory and enforcement practices when setting and implementing policies on devolved issues. As part of that strategy, Departments undertake regulatory impact assessments each time they develop a new policy, amend an existing policy or develop proposals for legislation. They are also required to consult all stakeholders at an early stage and to draw up a preliminary assessment that includes estimating the cost implications for business.

When a substantial impact is identified, Departments must set a date within 10 years of the introduction of the legislation to test the need for the measure to

continue. Departments are also required to carry out a micro-business test to assess the impact of any proposal on businesses with fewer than five employees. That addresses the issue that Mr Shannon raised about the number of small businesses in particular that are affected. My Department checks that those procedures are conducted, and we have evidence that that is the case.

To further assist business, Departments have to provide guidance on new legislation at least 12 weeks before it comes into operation. The only exception is when timetables are dictated either by emergency situations, such as risks to health, or by European Union legislative requirements.

In the second half of 2006, my Department conducted a review of the strategy. As an integral part of that, recent better-regulation developments in the rest of the United Kingdom were examined. Those included simplification plans, improved regulatory impact assessment arrangements, implementation of EU legislation without gold-plating, and improvements to the sanctioning system. In each case, we examined the Northern Ireland position to ensure that all necessary steps were being taken to ensure that we were not falling behind.

Representatives of the main business organisations were consulted, including the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation. Ideas and concerns put forward by them were taken fully into account.

The review report was also discussed with the Economic Development Forum's enterprise subgroup, which fully endorsed the recommendations. The review concluded that the existing Northern Ireland strategy should continue, but that a number of steps should be taken to strengthen it. As a result, all Northern Ireland Departments are now to include an objective to encourage better regulation in their corporate and/or operating plans.

Greater efforts will be made to communicate better-regulation developments through departmental websites and meetings with representative groups. Each Department has also undertaken to review all legislation, forms and enforcement arrangements that impact on business. Departments are also considering the simplification plans of their Whitehall equivalents to ensure that any improvements are reflected in Northern Ireland.

1.30 pm

The review also committed the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to publish annual reports to outline what Departments do to improve regulations each year. The 2006-07 report is available on the DETI website, and I invite Members

to read it. I am sure that they all did that before attending this debate.

Mr Burnside: At the end of the review, does the Minister expect that more or fewer regulations will be in place?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is my confident prediction that fewer regulations will be in place. If the Member had looked at the website, he would have seen that it tells a very good story, because consolidation is already taking place. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), for example, consolidated 12 sets of regulations into three, and repealed 12 sets of other regulations. The process has already begun, and I am glad of that.

As another example, of the 15 forms issued to businesses, Invest Northern Ireland amended three, consolidated five and removed one entirely. The Insolvency Service's business-modernisation project radically improved the way in which it undertakes its work and the service that it offers by providing new service-delivery channels through the Internet.

The Health and Safety Executive now provides a range of information and guidance to businesses in a variety of formats — including awareness days, free information packs and online guidance — in order to ensure that that is easily accessible to businesses. In response to a suggestion by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), an up-to-date list of all Northern Ireland health and safety regulations is provided on the Health and Safety Executive website. That allows businesses to easily find out what health and safety regulations are in force. That is just a sample of what my Department has been doing. I am determined that that work should continue, and that a further comprehensive review of the strategy will be carried out in 2011.

I take this issue very seriously. As the proposer of the motion, Mr Hamilton, said, it is important to bear down on regulation where it is unnecessary or superfluous. As I said earlier, there will be examples where it is necessary and important to have regulation. Mr Hamilton also mentioned the amount of subordinate legislation that is passed in the Assembly, without much debate, that places obligation on businesses. I take the Member's point entirely. If there are particular areas of concern about subordinate legislation, I am all too willing to consider, in respect of any specific example, whether that regulation is necessary or required. Mr Hamilton made a very important point when he said that our aim must be to build a better regulatory environment. That is what we want to achieve in Northern Ireland, and I am committed to that task.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mr Paul Maskey, made a number of very useful points. I appreciate his

support for what the Department is trying to do. The Member for North Down Mr Cree talked in more general terms about the private sector, and about the need to see it grow. I agree entirely with him.

The issue of regulation and bureaucracy is important. However, as we know, in order to achieve the private-sector objectives, the key drivers of the economy — skills, infrastructure, enterprise and innovation — must be invested in. As a member of the DETI Committee — and having gone through the Programme for Government in enormous detail — Mr Cree will know that the Programme for Government puts the economy at centre stage, and guarantees investment in those key drivers of the economy. That is exactly what needs to happen.

Mr Cree quite rightly praised a number of exporters. Very challenging targets have been set to ensure that 600 companies will export outside Northern Ireland within three years. New companies are also needed to export goods, and that will drive the economy forward.

Mr Simpson raised a number of very important points. He talked about investigating various complaints with a view to removing as many layers of bureaucracy as possible. I will do that if Members bring any particular issues of concern to me about specific regulations. Mr Simpson also asked about the methods used by DETI to check how closely Departments adhere to those regulations. I mentioned that officials in the regulatory impact unit of my Department liaise closely with other such units in other Departments.

As for the effectiveness of the system, we receive completed regulatory impact assessments from all Northern Ireland Departments, which are scrutinised carefully. The Member raised several issues about gas and electricity supply, and he will be aware that that, to some extent, is beyond my remit. However, I will examine those matters, and write to him. Mr McLaughlin also raised points in broad support of the thrust the motion.

The motion calls on me to investigate the potential for a review of business bureaucracy. I trust that, in the brief time that is available to me, I have demonstrated that the regulatory burden on business is kept continually under review, and that mechanisms are already in place to minimise both the volume of regulations and the problems associated with them. However, if Members have any particular concerns, I ask them to contact me, and I will be happy to investigate.

Mr Newton: The motion probably will, I hope, be agreed with very little discord in the Chamber. Although some Members may place differing emphasis on certain aspects of the motion, it is gratifying to have the Minister here and to see that there is unanimity in favour of the motion.

Members who were outside the Chamber over a year ago — before the Assembly was in operation — would not have put money on the Budget and the Programme

for Government supporting the business community and creating additional well-paid jobs for our people.

I note that the Minister has expressed concerns about this issue. In the Chamber, about a year ago, he said that he would do everything in his power to advance the agenda of deregulation, streamline bureaucracy, simplify form filling, and reduce information requests to businesses. That statement was welcomed at that time, and I welcome his repeating it in the Assembly today.

All Members who spoke in the debate acknowledged that much of the regulation and red tape emanates from Westminster and the European Community. However, that does not invalidate the debate, because this is a matter of concern for business organisations throughout the UK, and for elected representatives and devolved Administrations throughout the UK.

It cannot be argued that we do not need regulation — it is necessary to ensure that business is transacted in a fair, safe and equitable manner. However, I wish to highlight some problems — particularly the position of small and medium-sized enterprises, as referred to by Jim Shannon. The burden of meeting regulations falls on the shoulders of family businesses and owner/managers, and their time is required to deal with the red tape. We all know that time is money.

It has already been said that it is estimated that the average SME spends about seven hours a week on form filling, and often that is additional to the working week, rather than part of it. I acknowledge that although the motion calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to investigate the potential for a widespread review of business bureaucracy in Northern Ireland, the problem is not in his bailiwick alone, and is not confined to his Department. David Simpson has already provided a couple of relevant examples. I also concede that it is difficult to identify exactly where the unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape is, and who should sort out and adjudicate the level of the necessity for such red tape.

Many reports have been produced by business schools, universities and business organisations throughout the length and breadth of the UK. However, until those in the highest levels of Government recognise that there is a problem, the potential for the devolved Administrations to address this matter is minimal.

The ethos of Westminster and Brussels must be one of giving support and encouragement to businesses, rather than piling additional burdens on their shoulders. The system of Government should be driven by the attitude that minimalist is best in the area of red tape, until proven otherwise. I hope that, if this motion is passed, a message will be carried by all Northern Ireland MPs to the House of Commons, and indeed through local lords to the House of Lords.

It has been mentioned that DETI produced a better-regulation report in March, and that was a very welcome step. It provides us with a baseline; a foundation on which to build. It is a report that will help to build some confidence in the SME sector. However, we need to move beyond generalisation about red tape.

Underpinning the future approach there needs to be a measurement of the cost to SMEs in time, money and effort of showing compliance to a legislative body's requirements. Challenging targets need to be set — as has been argued in many areas of the Assembly in various Departments — as well as a measurement system to confirm that progress in reducing the bureaucracy is being achieved. Those must be targets that each year can be enhanced, demonstrating progress and helping the business sector increase its efforts to spend additional time in real business activity, a point made by David Simpson.

It is that kind of approach that was outlined by William Sargent, executive chairperson of the Better Regulation Executive in Westminster. It is a businesslike approach, and only that type of action will actually result in our making progress. We need to release the entrepreneurs from form-filling and give them back those seven hours per week. That cannot be achieved by civil servants on their own. Business needs to play its part. There must be a partnership approach so that Departments know the impact of new regulations on small businesses in particular. Creating increasing levels of contact between Government and business owners and managers is necessary — a point that, I think, was made by the Minister. That contact should build profitable two-way relationships and increase levels of business understanding within Government. Unless the business community understands what the Government are attempting to achieve, and the Government understand the impact of regulations on business, this problem will remain a continuing source of complaint.

There were many excellent and relevant points made by other Members. My colleague Simon Hamilton, in proposing the motion, placed emphasis on that additional time spent by businesses in dealing with red tape. In the life of a small company, in particular, the time that is spent dealing with red tape is precious. Mr Hamilton stated that the cost of dealing with red tape is about £55.6 billion UK wide. Paul Maskey indicated that legislation to reduce the amount of red tape should be a key priority, that he was supportive of the motion, and that a clear message should be sent to the business community about our intentions to support it.

Leslie Cree placed his emphasis on the need for growing a knowledge-based economy, and said that the role of Government and the Assembly in creating that was vitally important. Unless the conditions are right, the inward investment we seek — or the additional

investment from resident companies — will not be available. Supporting the exporters is absolutely essential, and we do not want, if I quote Mr Cree correctly, to “blunt their efforts”. David Simpson — who obviously comes at this from two perspectives, both as an elected representative and as a businessman in his constituency — stressed the EU’s role in this. He referred to two companies in his constituency that were suffering from red tape; that needs to be addressed.

1.45 pm

Mitchel McLaughlin talked about the difficult and challenging economy. He said that the Assembly must do everything in its power to streamline the interface between Government and business.

Jim Shannon spoke, with the passion that he brings to every subject, about cross-departmental red tape. He pointed out that red tape is not confined to DETI, but extends to other Departments. He said that legislation hampers growth and expansion and that micro-businesses often find it difficult to understand the language that is associated with red tape.

I thank the Minister for his presence, and I applaud his command of the subject. He is committed to providing ongoing delivery in the fight against bureaucracy.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the burden, in terms of time and money, placed upon business in the past by unnecessary bureaucracy, out-of-date regulations and the “gold plating” of EU legislation; and calls upon the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to investigate the potential for a widespread review of business bureaucracy in Northern Ireland, with the aim of simplifying and consolidating necessary regulation and eliminating that which is no longer required.

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr

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 the winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

I remind all Members that absolute privilege attaches to the making of statements in proceedings of the Assembly only for the purposes of the law of defamation. It is important to remember that privilege does not extend beyond that.

I also remind Members of the Speaker’s advice to the House on other occasions: with such protection comes responsibility. I strongly encourage Members to act responsibly when speaking in the debate.

I am sure that Members will be particularly anxious to do nothing that would prejudice any future court proceedings. That is the crux of what I want to say to the House, and I will bring to order any Member who strays beyond the parameters that I have set.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move:

That this Assembly notes with grave concern the report of the Police Ombudsman into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr and related matters; applauds the work of the McCord family’s campaign for justice; supports the ongoing criminal investigation into these matters; and calls on all individuals and organisations to co-operate fully with the Police Ombudsman and PSNI investigations.

Mr Speaker, I hope to follow closely your advice and injunction to the House. I welcome the opportunity to raise a most serious issue in the House. The death of Raymond McCord Jnr, the events that surrounded it, and the subsequent police investigation represent a scandal that involved the police and a brutal paramilitary organisation in north Belfast and Newtownabbey.

Peter Hain was Secretary of State when the Police Ombudsman’s report on the death of Mr McCord Jnr was published in January 2007. He released a statement, in which he said that the Ombudsman had:

“shone a light on a dark and murky period in the history of Northern Ireland.”

Everyone in the House should agree with that comment.

He also referred to the report’s finding that the investigation into Raymond McCord’s murder in November 1997:

“was fundamentally compromised because of the corrupting relationship between elements of the then RUC Special Branch and informants within the UVF in North Belfast.”

That was a scandalous situation.

He said that the report by Nuala O’Loan, the Police Ombudsman, was “comprehensive and thorough”, one that :

“makes for extremely uncomfortable reading.”

That is, in fact, to minimise the nature of the report. As I have said, the Police Ombudsman's report revealed a scandalous situation, with serious findings in respect of the RUC Special Branch. Speaking about police failures, the then Secretary of State went on to say that:

"no one should attempt to justify them."

He also said — and I agree with him — that a small number of Special Branch officers were involved, and that that small number:

"failed in their fundamental duty to protect the community".

It is important to remember that the majority of RUC officers were not found guilty of misconduct in respect of their duties or the finding of collusion. When one examines this scandalous situation, one can see that the influence of some Special Branch members distorted policing in Northern Ireland, in particular in north Belfast and Newtownabbey, because their influence created a situation whereby a police informant — "Informant 1" — escaped proper investigation and possible prosecution.

This case does not end with the death of Raymond McCord Jnr, but only begins with it, and it goes backwards and forwards in time because the main suspect and other informants were deemed, as a result of the report, to have been involved in other criminal activity.

The 10 murders that were the subject of investigation were those of: Mr Peter McTasney; Miss Sharon McKenna; Mr Sean McParland; Mr Gary Convie; Mr Eamon Fox; Mr Gerald Brady; Mr Thomas Sheppard; Mr John Harbinson; Mr Raymond McCord Jnr; and Mr Thomas English, who died in 2000. Those are 10 murders in which police informants were allegedly involved, according to the report. I believe that that 10 has increased to 17 — the other seven not being the subject of the report.

As a result of that investigation, a wide range of criminal activity by the UVF, in north Belfast and elsewhere, was uncovered. However, the most revealing and most damaging aspect of the affair was the involvement of elements of the Special Branch. Such was the extent of that involvement that the Police Ombudsman said in her findings that, because there were no credible explanations from the Special Branch and the police, the only conclusion that she could draw was that there was collusion between elements of the Special Branch and the UVF. That, surely, is a great indictment of policing in Northern Ireland, a shame on those who were involved, and brings dishonour on those who served the public honourably in the police service, whether in the RUC or its successor, the PSNI. That must be borne in mind by all Members in their consideration of the matter.

I want to remind Members of Mr McCord's perseverance, courage, tenacity and doggedness. Despite all the pressures on him from the authorities

and paramilitaries by way of threats and so forth, he stuck to his quest for truth and justice. In doing so, he has done a great service to the House, to the community and to policing in Northern Ireland. The subsequent Police Ombudsman's investigation, which began in 2002, has ultimately established that the speculation and rumours were facts. The House owes Mr McCord a considerable debt of gratitude for his persistence and public mindedness.

Never again can a situation arise where police handlers and intelligence gatherers become intimately associated with paramilitaries or any other criminal organisation. I hope that, as a result of the report, that never happens again. However, the disturbing failings that gave rise to the report and came to light after the murder are a timely reminder to everyone in the House of the number of victims of terrorism, collusion and of violence in our community. We must all be mindful of that.

If the report does anything, it must strengthen the resolve of everyone in politics to prevent any of that happening again. The cumulative effect of the actions of certain members of Special Branch and the police protected informants, particularly Informant 1, from investigation. That must never happen again in our lifetimes. Any kind of collusion must be prevented. I urge people to remember that when it comes to matters of national security so that mechanisms can be put in place to prevent that ever happening again.

Mr McCausland: The motion deserves the Assembly's full support. It states: "That this Assembly notes with grave concern the report of the Police Ombudsman into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr and related matters".

The report is comprehensive and thorough. It deals with a brutal murder. Many murders have occurred in Northern Ireland during the past 30 to 40 years, particularly in north Belfast and the surrounding area. Raymond McCord Jnr's murder was particularly brutal because he was found beaten to death at Ballyduff quarry — a young man of 22 years of age who had the rest of his life before him. The murder took place 11 years ago in 1997. The Police Ombudsman's report, which was published more than a year ago in January 2007, is the outworking of the campaign for justice by Raymond McCord Jnr's father and the family circle.

That is understandable because all victims and their families naturally seek justice. Like everyone else, victims deserve justice. The DUP, therefore, supports not only the McCord family's search for justice but the ongoing criminal investigation into those matters, which must be followed through to completion. The DUP calls on all individuals and organisations to co-operate fully with the investigations of the Police Ombudsman and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

2.00 pm

The Police Ombudsman's report examined the relationship between the security forces and informants, during what was referred to earlier as a "dark and murky period", and it focused on one paramilitary organisation. However, collusion stretches across a number of paramilitary organisations both on the loyalist and the republican sides, and the Police Ombudsman's comprehensive report significantly opened up that world.

Importantly, the report included a list of recommendations. Too often, reports gather dust on shelves and their recommendations are not followed through. It is important that the recommendations of the Police Ombudsman are followed through to full effect. Not only would that bring us closer to resolving this case and delivering justice to the McCord family but it would ensure that nothing of that nature happens again. Alban Maginness paid tribute to the McCord family circle for its campaign for truth and justice. To a certain extent, the family's tenacity was rewarded with the publication of the report, but much more could and should be done.

Across our society, families are crying out for justice. The work of the Historical Enquiries Team is ongoing, which helps to a limited degree. From my perspective, many crimes will never be fully resolved because the perpetrators have died. In other cases, people possess information but are unwilling to release it.

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

Mr McCausland: For that reason, it is possible that the resolution for which we hope will not be achieved.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I commend the Members for tabling the motion. Collusion, a Cheann Comhairle, between British state forces and others is a challenge to political institutions in how we respond to the needs of victims and address the issue of truth. It is a challenge for the Irish Government, which, from Sinn Féin's point of view, has adopted a less than effective approach to investigating collusion and its effects here, but especially in their own jurisdiction. It is a particular challenge for the British Government and their military and intelligence agencies, which established some of those paramilitary organisations and provided weapons, training and information as well as facilitating and directing attacks in which many citizens were murdered.

From the perspective of Sinn Féin and any objective onlooker, collusion was an administrative and institutionalised practice. It led not only to the deaths of more than 1,000 people — which impacted on their families — but to the deaths of more than a score of Sinn Féin members and members' relatives. Collusion also led to unionist citizens being murdered by those who claimed to be their defenders.

Raymond McCord Jnr was one such victim. I first met his father a number of years ago. He was campaigning, and is still campaigning, for justice. He alleges that at least two members of the UVF gang who were involved in the murder of his son were agents working for Special Branch, and he has named both men. As other Members said, he has been threatened and intimidated by the UVF, and he alleges that he has been harassed by members of the PSNI. Sinn Féin supports the McCord family's demand for an independent and internationally based inquiry into Raymond McCord Jnr's murder. I have raised the case with the British and Irish Governments, and, earlier this year, Raymond spoke at the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis.

As others have said, the Police Ombudsman produced a damning report, which confirmed Raymond McCord's accusations and went on to expose a depth of collusion that appeared to shock many unionists. I welcome the positive remarks from the Benches opposite.

Many reports from Amnesty International and other bodies have confirmed the use of collusion and state murder in cases ranging from the killing of Pat Finucane to a series of murders in County Tyrone, including one in Cappagh, and across the island. A number of official reports, such as the Stevens Report, have been suppressed by the British Government. A report in October 2006 concluded that at least 76 people died as a result of a gang that was based in Glenanne in south Armagh, which involved members of the RUC, UDR and MI5, along with members of unionist paramilitaries. Many of the people who were killed by that gang were citizens in the South. The subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, in Leinster House, concluded that those were acts of international terrorism. The Barron Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings also confirmed the existence of collusion.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, the British Government have never acknowledged any of that. On the contrary, they have sought to deny, cover up and suppress the truth. The judicial apparatus, from the lowest to the highest levels, including the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and some judges, connived to ensure that killings were not properly investigated, that many of those who were known to be involved were not prosecuted or, as in the case of Brian Nelson, were offered a deal to prevent the facts from coming out. All of those who were involved in running such operations in the British system were — and still are — protected from the legal consequences of their action, and public interest immunity certificates were used to withhold information at trials and inquests. In many cases, no inquests have been held into those killings. The extent of all of that is breathtaking.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Adams: Sorry, I do not have enough time, Danny.

Collusion was an integral part of the fabric of the British system's political and counter-insurgency strategy. The Ombudsman's report into the Loughinisland murders will be published in the near future, so I ask the Members opposite not to respond with a knee-jerk reaction. It is as much in the interests of unionists as anyone else to get the truth out. Families deserve to have the truth acknowledged and admitted to by those who killed their loved ones.

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

Mr Adams: Once again, I commend Raymond McCord, who deserves all our thanks for his significant part in bringing the issues to the surface. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Cree: Once again, the Assembly is debating an aspect of our painful past. I fear that some in the Chamber will do so without a due sense of responsibility to wider society, to those who have gone before us and to those who will come after us. During the Troubles, more than 3,500 people met with violent deaths. The perpetrators of the vast majority of those deaths have not been, and never will be, brought to justice. The pain, sorrow and loss of far too many families throughout society cannot and should not be forgotten.

Mr Raymond McCord Snr lost his son in horrific, evil circumstances. The murder in 1997 was one of too many heinous acts over three decades. The murder of Raymond McCord Jnr is a painful and bloody testimony to the effects of paramilitarism on society.

In the debate, we should not lose sight of that truth. Paramilitaries murdered Raymond McCord Jnr, just as paramilitaries murdered the vast majority of those who died violently between 1969 and 1998. Whatever other questions are asked today, that fundamental truth cannot go unsaid — paramilitaries murdered Raymond McCord Jnr.

In the face of murder at the hands of paramilitaries, both the families of victims and wider society have a rightful expectation that the police will fully and impartially investigate the crime, with the intention of gathering evidence that will lead to a prosecution in a court of law. That obligation on the police is part of the state's solemn duty to protect the rights and freedom of all in society. The Ulster Unionist Party regards that solemn duty as sacrosanct.

The Police Ombudsman's report on the police investigation into Raymond McCord Jnr's murder, without doubt, raised several significant and troubling questions. It must be noted, however, that since 1997, as would be expected in a post-conflict situation, procedures, responsibilities and organisation in the Police Service have changed considerably. The present Chief Constable's

comments about the Police Ombudsman's report are therefore important:

"Significant reorganisation and the new systems and processes to deal with this most difficult area of policing, which we have put in place over the last four and a half years, will ensure that the situation described by the ombudsman could never happen again in Northern Ireland."

Of course, much comment has surrounded the role of Special Branch officers in the investigation. Of primary importance is the realisation that, during the Troubles, Special Branch officers played a highly significant and courageous role in protecting society against terrorism. The former Police Ombudsman said:

"undoubtedly, Special Branch officers were effective in preventing bombings, shootings and other attacks."

Therefore, our society owes an immense debt of gratitude to those Special Branch officers who, throughout the Troubles, engaged in the most difficult and most necessary aspect of policing — confronting the threat posed by paramilitarism.

The balance to be struck by police officers with regard to protecting intelligence sources and investigating crime is, as any reasonable observer would recognise, not an exact science. Therefore, it is obviously wrong for politicians or others to seek to second-guess police officers' professional judgement in incredibly complex situations. That said, there can be no doubt that society should hold the actions of police officers and other agents of the state to infinitely higher standards than those of people engaged in criminal paramilitary activities.

While the Ombudsman's report into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr raised significant questions, it is also important to recognise that it has not been without its critics. That is an important aspect of the debate about policing in many societies. On this occasion, it was necessary to strike a proper balance between accountability and operational effectiveness.

The response of former senior police officers to the Ombudsman's report must be taken into consideration. In particular, the House should note the following comments from the Northern Ireland Retired Police Officers' Association:

"The misuse of the word 'collusion', without any legal anchorage, has led to it being used as a political catchphrase ... The Statement completely fails to contextualise the dilemmas facing the police in terms of the existing legal and disciplinary frameworks".

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The response continues:

"it oversimplifies the ethical and moral dilemmas; and it ignores the overriding priority set by HMG at the time to save life through the effective gathering, assessment, analysis and exploitation of intelligence".

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Cree: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I support the motion.

Dr Farry: I fully support the motion, and I thank its proposer for bringing the subject to our attentions. I also pay tribute to Raymond McCord Snr's long-running, and ongoing, campaign. In particular, I note his dogged persistence in pursuit of justice for his son and his wider family.

For far too long the claims made by Mr McCord were dismissed as being fanciful, and the Ombudsman's report has given considerable credence to the allegations that he has been making consistently over the past decade.

Members should note that the former Police Ombudsman upheld two of the four charges: that Mr McCord Jnr was murdered by a UVF figure who was also a police informant, and that the murder investigation by the RUC was flawed. The report raised a long list of wider concerns, including problems with record keeping and sham interviews.

2.15 pm

As Mr Alban Maginness outlined, Informant 1 has been associated with a wide range of crimes, including a long list of murders. That should be sobering for us all when we read the report. It is also of concern that the former Police Ombudsman reported that there was a lack of co-operation from a number of officers with her office, in particular from those who are retired.

We cannot bury our heads in the sand over reports of this nature. Although they make uncomfortable reading, it is likely that more uncomfortable truths will be exposed in the near future. That is part and parcel of the Eames/Bradley process. Regardless of how painful that is, it is a process that our society must go through in order to move on, build a shared future and promote reconciliation.

The mechanisms are in place for us to begin to hold the state to account for actions that occurred that were outside the law. However, there is an imbalance because many members of paramilitary organisations who perpetrated crimes are not under any pressure to reveal the truth and provide comfort to those who suffered at their hands. That should focus our minds as we move forward. It is correct to hold the state to account as long as it is the source of law and order in society. In doing so, we must be able to make the distinction between paying tribute to the role played by the RUC and the sacrifice that many of its officers made during the Troubles to protect wider society, and holding it — and individual officers — to account for involvement in illegal actions. I emphasise that that applies to a small minority of officers — the vast majority acted honourably and bravely.

To have a society that is based on the rule of law, there must be accountability and we must not be afraid

to acknowledge when the system breaks down. The RUC was faced with an incredibly difficult situation during the Troubles. Intelligence was an inevitable and important aspect of the RUC's work to counteract the extreme threat from loyalist and republican paramilitaries, which meant that informants had to be used. The problem was the lack of a framework for accountability. Home Office guidelines were not even adhered to, never mind not fully taken on board.

We do not have the luxury of knowing about the successes of the intelligence that was gathered, but we do know the costs through the lives that were lost. We must be concerned if officers can determine who lives and who dies — in essence playing God. In a society that is based on the rule of law, democracy and human rights, we must be concerned about every life and ensure that every death is properly investigated. We cannot turn a blind eye for the sake of an ill-defined greater good.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I join the other Members who spoke in welcoming the debate. I also welcome that the motion has been brought to the House by SDLP Members because in February 2007, after the report was published, my party colleagues and I brought a similar motion to Lisburn City Council. On that occasion, it was very disappointing that the SDLP members of the council did not speak on the motion and abstained from the vote on it. Therefore, I am glad that SDLP Members have brought the motion to the House.

Nuala O'Loan's report into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr and the activities of the north Belfast UVF gang confirmed what nationalists and republicans have known for years — that collusion played a huge part in the British Government's war on the nationalist and republican people here.

Mrs O'Loan also claimed that Special Branch officers who colluded with the UVF could not have operated as they did without knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and Special Branch. The fact that those senior officers then refused to co-operate with the Ombudsman's inquiry added further insult to the grieving families.

However, the involvement of high-ranking RUC officers is only part of the web of deceit. Collusion could work only with the knowledge of all its participants, including MI5, British military intelligence and the British Cabinet. Furthermore, the Force Research Unit (FRU) was a unit of the British Army —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Ms J McCann: No. FRU was a unit of the British Army that was responsible for the recruitment and the running of British agents whom they directed to murder Irish citizens. FRU was answerable to a task co-ordinating group made up of the RUC's Special

Branch, the Chief Constable of the RUC and other intelligence services.

In turn, the task co-ordinating group was accountable to the Joint Security Committee, now known as the Joint Intelligence Committee. That committee is directly responsible to the British Prime Minister and has overall control in all security issues. Therefore, the British Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, was aware of everything — and is still aware of everything — happening in intelligence circles.

A number of reports and inquiries, namely the Cory Report; the Barron Report; Stevens I, Stevens II and Stevens III; and the Stalker Report, together with a number of other reports and inquiries, have found that collusion went to the very heart of the British establishment. In addition, the findings of an inquiry carried out by a team of international lawyers into dozens of murders here in the 1970s showed that Government officials were aware of collusion between members of the UDR and loyalist killer gangs. Up to 15% of UDR members were directly linked to loyalist paramilitary organisations, and UDR weapons were used in the murder and attempted murder of nationalists.

There is no doubt that the findings of Nuala O'Loan's report into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr uncovered only a small part of what actually happened. Furthermore, the lack of a credible response from unionist politicians at the time must have been a major let-down for the unionist, Protestant community, given the fact that four of the victims that were referred to in the report were from that community.

There is also no doubt that if a similar inquiry were conducted into killings by loyalists in any other part of Ireland, like findings would emerge. Families who were directly affected by the policy of collusion are entitled to the truth about why a state agency that is supposed to uphold the law and protect citizens was instrumental in their murder. It was only through the campaign and efforts of Mr McCord's father and his family that reports like Mrs O'Loan's — and others — are possible. Some of those families have been insulted and demonised because they dare to seek the truth of what actually happened to their loved ones.

The people of the North of Ireland are entitled to a policing service that is free from political and sectarian control. They are also entitled to a service that is representative of the local community, that observes and protects human rights and that is founded on the ethos of equality. Therefore, the campaign to expose collusion must continue, and those who were responsible for directing murder and human-rights abusers must be held to account for their actions. Collusion must be exposed. Any suggestion of state-sanctioned murder should be of concern to everyone, and families are entitled to the truth. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mrs Dolores Kelly.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Commissioner for Older People

1. **Mr Cree** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a timescale within which the Office of Commissioner for Older People will be established. (AQO 3090/08)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): The establishment of an older persons' commissioner is a priority for us, and we are keen to maintain momentum in establishing that post. Work is ongoing on the establishment of that office, and we have appointed an independent organisation to advise on the commissioner's role and remit. That organisation is due to report in the near future and its report, which is being finalised, will include views that were expressed by key stakeholders at three preliminary consultation events.

Further consultation is planned, including with our departmental Committee. The necessary legislation will be drafted after the Executive agree on the role and powers of a commissioner and once formal consultation has been completed. That legislation will be progressed following the normal Assembly procedures, and we expect the process to take 18 months after Executive clearance has been given. Interim arrangements are being developed, and junior Ministers will make an announcement on those shortly.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister consider the Welsh Assembly's experience in such an important area?

The deputy First Minister: We must recognise that this issue has been exercising all Assemblies. The rights of older people are very important. Lessons on how others have dealt with the issues will be considered, but there is some way to go before then. Legislation is needed, and all Members will have the chance to contribute to any discussions on the matter. Consultations with the Committee and with others will continue. Getting the process right is more important than the speed of the process. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that our approach takes account of lessons from others, provided that they have lessons to teach us.

Mr Shannon: What discussions has the deputy First Minister had with older people's organisations such as

Help the Aged? Has he asked for their input and their thoughts on how best their views can be represented at the highest level?

The deputy First Minister: It is critical to consult fully with all people before making important decisions that will have an impact on everyone's lifestyle; in this instance, our older people. Adequate procedures have been diligently put in place to ensure that we listen very carefully to what they have to say. Having done that, we cannot then be accused at a later stage of failing to consult the most important people at the heart of the issue.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister say what, if any, mechanisms have been put in place by the Executive, including by those Ministers who are responsible for abolishing poverty, to assist those older people who have been left severely impoverished by the latest substantial increases in fuel, energy and grocery costs?

The deputy First Minister: I am not sure whether that supplementary question relates to the initial question; however, it is a legitimate point of view.

Members are particularly concerned about the recent big increases in fuel prices and about the impact that they will have on older people. All Departments recognise their responsibilities in considering how to alleviate such a huge pressure, and they accept that the issues that are involved cannot be left to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

World forces beyond our control are at play. Wars around the planet are contributing to fuel price increases and are imposing additional poverty on people.

I sympathise with the view that the Member expressed. I assure her that all Departments are conscious of the need to ensure a joined-up approach to alleviating the difficulties that older people, in particular, will face in the difficult economic times that lie ahead.

Consultation

2. **Mr Burnside** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what, if any, discussions or consultations have been held with the UK Government on issues that impact on Northern Ireland but are outside the remit of NI Departments. (AQO 3192/08)

The deputy First Minister: The memorandum of understanding between the British Government and the devolved Administrations commits the parties to effective communication in consultation with one another on issues that may have a bearing on one another's responsibilities. Therefore, a wide variety of discussions will be conducted at official and ministerial level across the Administration, not only with the British Government on reserved and excepted matters, but with the Irish Government and the European Union institutions.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regularly participates in meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee to discuss excepted European matters that impinge on devolved responsibilities. We also meet formally through the work of the British-Irish Council.

Mr Burnside: The deputy First Minister possibly has little personal interest in the question that I am about to ask, as he probably spent about 35 years of his professional life avoiding surveillance from Royal Air Force helicopters. Nevertheless, last week, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) took the serious decision of withdrawing the Royal Air Force from RAF Aldergrove. That closure includes the transfer of 700 service personnel, plus hundreds of extra civilian personnel who were connected with RAF Aldergrove and linked to Massereene Barracks.

Will the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister provide a corporate response on the consultation that took place between OFMDFM, the MOD and Her Majesty's Government? How many meetings took place between OFMDFM, Her Majesty's Government and the MOD? Why did the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister fail abysmally in maintaining a Royal Air Force presence in the Province?

The deputy First Minister: The Member is well aware that he has raised an issue over which the Assembly and the Executive have no authority. That is a direct rule matter. With regard to the decisions that direct rule Ministers have made over the years, there was very little consultation —

Mr Burnside: None?

The deputy First Minister: — between direct rule Ministers and Assembly Members.

Mr Burnside: None?

The deputy First Minister: The Member needs to stop badgering me.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members to make their remarks through the Chair.

The deputy First Minister: I understand the issue that the Member raised, and I understand why he is exercised by it. I am not aware of any such discussions between the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the MOD and Her Majesty's Government. However, there may have been discussions with departmental officials. We will check on that and provide the Member with a response.

Mr Gallagher: Was the issue of tax credits raised during those discussions? In Northern Ireland, there are thousands of people who filled in their forms properly and followed the correct procedure, yet they are now being billed for £5,000 or £10,000 of overpayments. Those people have done nothing wrong, yet they are

being harassed by debt collectors who telephone them, or, as has increasingly been the case, call at their doors to demand payment. Will the deputy First Minister raise that matter again and ask for an end to the disgraceful treatment of those people, who have done nothing wrong?

The deputy First Minister: Members must be conscious that the First Minister and I can answer questions only in respect of our Department's responsibilities. As I said, there will be wide ongoing contact involving all Departments, and it would not be appropriate for me to respond on their behalf.

The Departments with responsibility for those matters will, undoubtedly, tackle the difficulties that inefficiency in the tax credit system creates for many people. Members have a responsibility to act on behalf of those who have been affected detrimentally and must express their dissatisfaction at the treatment of people, many of whom live in poverty.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the deputy First Minister agree with Gordon Brown's recent announcement at Westminster that the north of Ireland will be excluded from the policy of flying the Union flag on schools, colleges and Government buildings? Does he agree that such practice runs contrary to the Good Friday Agreement, does not respect people's identities, damages good relations, contravenes fair employment legislation and does not create neutral environments?

Mr Shannon: The same goes for the Celtic goalkeeper yesterday.

The deputy First Minister: I am reluctant, upon Jim Shannon's invitation, to enter into a debate about sport. However, I congratulate the Derry senior Gaelic football team, which defeated Kerry yesterday to win the all-Ireland National Football League division one final.

We are aware of the British Government's intention to introduce new arrangements for flying the Union flag on Government buildings in England, Scotland and Wales. The Green Paper consultation in 2007 on that issue and other reforms confirmed that those changes will not apply here because we are subject to separate legislation on the flying of flags on Government buildings.

The Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000, which regulates the flying of flags on Government buildings here, is the responsibility of the Secretary of State and not the Assembly. If individual Members — probably more on the unionist rather than the nationalist or republican side of the House — are concerned about the flying of flags in England, Scotland and Wales, they should approach the Secretary of State for Justice because OFMDFM is not responsible for that issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that this is not Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park — it is Oral Answers to Questions in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

3. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the main differences between the draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and the Integration; the Shared Future report; and the Racial Equality Strategy. (AQO 3151/08)

The deputy First Minister: As we have stated on many occasions, we are fully committed to building a shared and better future for all. We will introduce a programme of cohesion, sharing and integration to tackle sectarianism and racism, which will refresh the previous Administration's separate but associated policies on good relations and good race relations.

The new programme will reflect the new political dispensation and provide a positive lead on the important aspects of building our new society. We will consider the changing social context that is faced by the community and welcome and integrate new communities into our society. The programme will tackle issues that affect established communities and new arrivals and will build on, and not supplant, the excellent work already completed.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not intend to dispense with effective initiatives simply for the sake of change. Our commitment, and that of the Executive, is demonstrated through the Programme for Government and the Budget, and we have put our money where our collective will is.

During the incoming comprehensive spending review period, we will invest an additional £7.5 million and, therefore, our total investment will be approximately £29 million, which includes a substantial increase in funding for minority ethnic communities. That additional funding will target directly those areas that are blighted by racism and sectarianism, deliver continued improvement in relationships and address the challenges facing new and host communities.

2.45 pm

Mrs D Kelly: The deputy First Minister stated earlier that he was here to answer questions on matters that are the responsibility of his Department. I asked him to outline the main differences between the two programmes, but I did not receive an answer. Perhaps he will reply to me in writing.

Will the deputy First Minister inform the House of the status of the good relations indicators baseline report?

The deputy First Minister: Our task was to assess the effectiveness of previous policies and, where necessary, to refresh the strategic approach in order to reflect changing circumstances and the way in which Government should respond to them. We have sought to take into account the impact of many highly successful local initiatives, which many people have undertaken, often away from the spotlight, in order to produce a vision and strategy that reflects the aspirations of the Executive and the Assembly, but which, most importantly, empowers that work for the future.

The commitments contained in the Programme for Government are widely recognised as having set a clear course, which emphasises what we seek to achieve over the next three years. The programme of cohesion sharing and integration that we will announce shortly will add detail to that high-level policy. It is a political commitment. The Member should reserve judgement until we make that announcement, and then comparisons can be made.

Mrs Long: I suspect that the Member will have to reserve judgement for some time, because that policy has been a long time in gestation, and we have yet to see any out-turn from it.

The deputy First Minister stated his commitment to supporting local action, which all Members would agree is very valuable. Will he confirm that the new strategy will examine the contribution that can be made by central Government's strategies, expenditure and programmes in tackling segregation in society?

The deputy First Minister: I accept that there is criticism about the length of time that the strategy has taken. However, our approach is to take as long as is required to ensure that we get it right. We do not apologise to anyone for that. We intend to bring proposals to the Committee and to the Assembly as soon as possible. Officials are drafting a policy document, and they have briefed the Committee, of which Mrs Long is a member, on progress made to date. The process is progressing well, and we anticipate completing it in the immediate future.

I wish to draw attention, however, to the emphasis in the Executive's Programme for Government and Budget, which clearly confirms our commitment to tackling racism and sectarianism. We are giving a clear lead, and we endorse ongoing work on the ground that has proven to be successful in building new relationships within and between communities. Refreshing that policy will not compromise what has been achieved already, rather it will support, facilitate and better resource that good practice. Considerable work is taking place. People are working hard on the issue; we want to get it right. The financial commitment that was made by the Executive is a clear example of putting our money where our mouths are.

Mr McCausland: I welcome the deputy First Minister's endorsement of the principle of a shared society and a shared future, which includes shared public space. Will he, therefore, support the right of the Orange Institution to share the Springfield Road, Garvaghy Road and the village of Dunloy when exercising its right to peaceful assembly?

The deputy First Minister: In recent years, there have been many difficulties in several towns and villages in the North. Indeed, many Members and many members of my party have attempted to diffuse very dangerous situations. Many of those people have been assaulted, or have had their lives threatened, but they have stood firm in the face of those in society who would attempt to exacerbate difficulties in relationships between sections of our community.

I became closely involved when a serious situation developed in Dunloy only a few years ago on 12 July, or it may have been 12 August — I cannot remember which. I got into a car and drove straight from the centre of Derry city to Dunloy in an attempt to diffuse the situation.

There are certain issues that must be resolved. Those issues would be best resolved through dialogue between people at the heart of conflict in local communities. Everyone has a responsibility to attempt to ensure that we have peaceful summers from now on. That represents a huge challenge, but there are many people, from all sides, who want to contribute to a better atmosphere and to better community relations. I appeal to everyone to continue that work. We must not be divisive in our approach to this matter. We must resolve the difficulties — which are now very small in number — in a manner whereby everyone's rights are protected.

Victims' Commissioners: Workplan

4. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on the expected work to be conducted by the four Victims' Commissioners.
(AQO 3199/08)

The deputy First Minister: Subject to the Assembly's approving the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, we expect that the commissioners will soon get down to carrying out the duties that were outlined in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Those duties include promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors; reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in this area; and reviewing the effectiveness of services for victims and survivors. All those activities will be carried out within an agreed work programme, which is being prepared by the commissioners designate in anticipation of their formal employment.

Mr Ford: That was a fine answer. However, the First Minister and deputy First Minister failed to come

to the House last week to make a statement on not proceeding with the Bill. Indeed, in practice, they continue to kick victims in the teeth.

Will the deputy First Minister share the proposed amendments to the Bill with the House? Will he give a categorical guarantee that the Bill will be proceeded with next week, in line with the draft Order Paper? Will he also guarantee that he and the First Minister will end their blockade of the process, start to put victims first, and stop carrying on as they have been in recent times?

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The deputy First Minister: The abiding principle of establishing the Victims' Commission is to generate real support for those who need and deserve it most — the victims and survivors — in as timely a fashion as possible. The tabled amendments, to which the Member refers, are being considered carefully. None of those amendments has been dismissed or adopted at this stage. It is incumbent on Members not to use the issue of victims and survivors as a political football in the Assembly. We must recognise that this is important work.

Mr Ford: We know that it is important work, but do you?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The deputy First Minister: I am not going to finish until I have silence.

This issue is hugely sensitive for victims and survivors throughout our community. There has been an attempt to play political football with the issue.

Mr Ford: Yes, and it started with you.

The deputy First Minister: No, it did not start with us.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Remarks must be made through the Chair.

The deputy First Minister: While many Members were on their Christmas holidays, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister were working to try to resolve this issue, and were implementing a process that addresses the real needs and concerns of victims. We hope that the relevant legislation will be put before the Assembly — and passed — within a very short period, and that the four commissioners will be installed as soon as possible.

Mr Kennedy: The deputy First Minister, and others, have produced a Christmas turkey that has not yet been dealt with.

Does the deputy First Minister and his party support, in principle, the appointment of a lead commissioner to carry forward the newly proposed commission's important work? Will he indicate whether agreement has been reached in his Department — between his party and the DUP — on any, or all, of the tabled amendments to the legislation?

The deputy First Minister: This is a work in progress, and the Member will receive answers to those questions in due course. Hopefully, that will be sooner than the Member expects.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the delay in establishing the commission affect the funding of victims' and survivors' groups for this year?

The deputy First Minister: As I said earlier, we will provide £36 million over the next three years for work with victims and survivors.

Following consultation with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we will shortly introduce a strategy for victims and survivors that will set out our plans for their future support. We anticipate that current funding arrangements in relation to the memorial fund and the core-funding and development grant schemes for victims' and survivors' groups that are operated on behalf of our office will continue during the financial year 2008-09.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will work closely with the memorial fund, the Community Relations Council, the new commission and the Victims' and Survivors' Forum to manage the transition to the new funding arrangements that will be set out in the strategy for victims and survivors. Moreover, in liaison with the commission, for certain areas of need already identified, the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will introduce enhanced support for victims' and survivors' groups to provide befriending services for victims and survivors, enhanced provision for respite care, and support for general practitioners in dealing with trauma. Other areas of emerging need may be examined by the new commission.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn; the Member who asked question 6 is not in the Chamber; and question 7 has also been withdrawn.

Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC

8. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to review the work of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC. (AQO 3155/08)

The deputy First Minister: The work of all business areas of OFMDFM is evolving and is constantly under review. Since the reintroduction of devolution, the role of the bureau in Washington DC has changed significantly. The bureau plays a vital role in supporting the Executive and Assembly in all matters that have a United States dimension.

In recent months, the bureau has become increasingly involved in supporting our economy through the promotion of the investment conference with key figures in the Bush Administration, the US Congress and corporate America. The bureau also played a key role

in bringing the New York pension-funds investment project to a successful conclusion through its work with the Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York and the Emerald Investment Development Fund LP. In January, the bureau's presence in the US was enhanced by the appointment of a full-time, New York-based manager.

From a strategic perspective, the Executive plan to develop a comprehensive international-relations strategy to address the need for overseas representation. Whereas efforts to date have concentrated on the United States and Europe, consideration will be given to countries in Asia, where there are significant opportunities for inward investment and trade.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. In view of the increased demands on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as a result of the investment conference, the follow-up to that conference and other matters, are there plans to increase the resources available to OFMDFM?

The deputy First Minister: The bureau has been involved in important work to assist OFMDFM in ensuring the success of the conference. Those involved have worked very hard and they are under considerable pressure — not least because several Ministers have visited the United States. Every time a Minister visits that country, it adds to staff workload. Nevertheless, staff welcome that and are satisfied that visits raise our profile. They know, as do the Executive, that we must continually review our performance and representation in the United States, given that we are now open for business.

This is a good-news story. Our initial expectation in sending invitations to chief executive officers in the United States was that 30 or 40 might attend the conference; however, the number that has accepted has exceeded all expectation. If all who have accepted the invitation come to the conference, the turnout will be huge: it may be double the number expected.

What flows from that and the prospect of increased inward investment from companies in the United States could put pressure on the Executive and on the bureau.

The only way to deal with it is to keep it under review, and if additional resources are required due to an increased workload, then the Executive will consider that.

3.00 pm

ENVIRONMENT

Armagh Observatory

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment what action she is taking to ensure adequate funding for the Armagh Observatory given the environmental work it carries out in relation to climate change.

(AQO 3188/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster):

Government funding for Armagh Observatory rests with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I have recently written to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure highlighting my Department's use of information provided by the observatory in assessing climate change in Northern Ireland. In my letter to the Minister, I have stated that the climate data which we have obtained from the observatory:

"is an important tool used by the Department in monitoring climate change in Northern Ireland and I would be concerned if a situation were to arise whereby the Observatory would be no longer able to supply such information."

I am hopeful that such an important facility will continue to receive the necessary Government support to secure its future for generations to come — however, this is ultimately a matter for the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response — she has actually answered my supplementary question as well. Will she give me an assurance that she will keep me informed in relation to this matter?

The Minister of the Environment: I am happy to confirm that I will. Once I have the response from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I will share a copy of it with the Member.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister tell us if any mechanism exists between the Ministers and Departments, where publicly funded facilities such as the observatory are used by different Departments, to liaise with one another to produce additional funding when the core funding for such a body is no longer adequate during a particular financial year?

The Minister of the Environment: That is precisely what I have done. When Mr Dominic Bradley raised the subject of Armagh Observatory at Question Time on 31 March, I took the opportunity to write to my colleague regarding the matter, and, on receipt of a response, I will make the House aware of it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister has stated, she gave an undertaking at a previous Question Time that she would raise this matter at Executive level. Will the Minister report on any discussions she has had on this issue at that level?

The Minister of the Environment: I have not had any discussions at Executive level, but I have written to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. When I have received a response from him, I will decide whether there is a need to take it to the Executive.

Dangerous Wild Animals

2. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm (i) the frequency with which owners of dangerous wild animals are obliged to renew their licence to own such animals; and (ii) that these licences permit the owners to keep the animal(s) at one address only. (AQO 3095/08)

The Minister of the Environment: A licence to keep dangerous wild animals is valid for one year from the date of issue. Licence-holders must reapply to the Department for a licence before the expiry of their existing licence. A veterinary inspection will then be carried out and a recommendation made to the Department as to whether a licence should be granted for a further year. Each licence is issued to the applicant and is specific to the premises detailed in the application.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister agree that the desirable situation would be for every wild animal in private ownership to be electronically tagged to ensure that enforcement of licensing provisions is made more effective?

The Minister of the Environment: I understand where the Member is coming from. The licence has to be applied for annually, and, as well as the annual inspection, vets can be called to inspect the animals if we believe there is a reason to do so. We believe that the way in which the licence-holders are monitored is effective, and we will continue with the process as it stands.

Mr Ross: Can the Minister detail what species of animal comes under the description of "dangerous wild animal" and indicate how many of these dangerous wild animals there are in Northern Ireland?

Mr Weir: Are any of them in the Chamber?

The Minister of the Environment: I am glad to confirm that none of them is in the Chamber, as asked from the sedentary position behind me. The types of animals that are held under licence are such as small primates, raccoons, emu, vicuña, a wolf-dog, venomous snakes, caimans, zebra, one tiger and a cheetah, which is a small cat derived from crossing a Bengal cat and an Ocicat. Do not ask any further questions, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I do not think that I would be able to supply you with the answers.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that to secure the humane treatment of the animals involved and to reassure people about public safety, serious questions must be asked as to why an individual wants to keep dangerous wild animals? Furthermore, does the Minister agree that thorough checks should be made on the conditions in

which the animals are being kept and on what training the individual received to look after the animal?

The Minister of the Environment: Individuals who wish to keep wild animals must apply for and obtain a licence, and departmental officials will look at those issues when processing applications. Licences are granted not only to individuals but for a specific area, so that we can see where the animals are supposed to be at any given time. Departmental officials can call at addresses to ensure that the areas of concern mentioned by the Member can be checked. I am content that the current regime is effective, and we will continue to apply it.

World Heritage Sites and National Parks

3. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of the Environment if she has any plans to develop applications for additional world heritage sites and national parks to develop further Northern Ireland's tourist potential. (AQO 3097/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to propose another world heritage site for Northern Ireland. However, my Department is willing to work with those who are keen to explore that possibility. The Department of the Environment will have to consider carefully any proposals for additional sites before submitting them to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which leads on world heritage matters for the UK Government.

I am giving careful consideration to the issue of national parks and the proposal to establish a Mourne national park. I do not have any plans to consider other areas as potential national parks.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she report to the House on the up-to-date position of the potential development of the Giant's Causeway, which is a world heritage site? Will she also inform the House of the timescale wherein she expects major progress to be made on that important project?

The Minister of the Environment: I have not, as yet, received a planning application for a visitor site at the world heritage site at the Giant's Causeway. Discussions are taking place between my officials and the National Trust, but I have not received a planning application. I am hopeful, however, that a planning application is weeks, not months, away.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

4. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline (i) the consultation process in the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI); and (ii) the support available for landowners within a newly designated ASSI area. (AQO 3134/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has a statutory duty, under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, to give notice of an ASSI declaration to every owner and occupier of lands that are affected, and to each district council in which part of the ASSI will be located. In addition, EHS must publish a notice in two local newspapers, at least, and display the designation documentation in a public area in the locality.

Prior to declaration, EHS tries to meet all landowners and occupiers individually to explain the reasons for the declaration and its implications for them. EHS must consider any representations or objections it receives through that consultation process before confirming the ASSI declaration.

With regard to support available to landowners, EHS is empowered by the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 to enter into a management agreement with an owner under its management of sensitive sites scheme (MOSS) to ensure that lands are managed in a manner that will secure the special scientific interest of the ASSI. If considered appropriate, payment may also be made in respect of ASSIs under the Northern Ireland countryside management scheme, which is administered by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Bresland: The farming community is concerned about the designation of ASSIs and how the designation of those areas is handled by the Environment and Heritage Service. What are the Minister's plans to increase the number of ASSIs in my constituency of West Tyrone, in particular? What percentage of land does her Department aspire to have under ASSI in Northern Ireland by 2010?

The Minister of the Environment: I am aware that the Member has been involved in the creation of a proposed ASSI in Lisnaragh in his constituency of West Tyrone. Officials from the EHS met landowners on 24 April, and Mr Bresland and Mrs McGill, who are Members for West Tyrone, were invited to that meeting. Therefore, the Member will be aware that the matter is ongoing.

The Programme for Government includes a target to declare 25 ASSIs during each of the next three years. That will be a significant step towards declaring the additional 200 ASSIs that are on the Department's priority list by 2016. The proportion of the land area of Northern Ireland covered by ASSI designation by 2010 will be approximately 7%. I am unable to specify what percentage of West Tyrone will be designated as an ASSI, but if I can provide the Member with that level of detail in the future, I will write to him.

Mr Ford: The Minister referred to the targets for the designation of ASSIs in the Programme for Government. Will she indicate how the achievement of

those targets is proceeding, given the resource constraints in the EHS, particularly with regard to staffing? Furthermore, will the Minister tell us whether she has considered using outside expertise to assist with the processes that were mentioned by Mr Bresland — specifically, early consultations and subsequent support to landowners?

The Minister of the Environment: The EHS established the target of 200 new sites for the Programme for Government. In doing so, it gave proper consideration to what resources would be required to deliver on what is, admittedly, a demanding and challenging commitment. I have already advised Members that the EHS will seek to secure beneficial land-management practices for ASSIs through the application of its management of sensitive sites scheme and also supported by the application of agrienvironment schemes that are administered by DARD under its rural development programme. I am content that adequate resources are available.

I take the Member's point about using outside help, and I am considering whether it is possible to employ EHS scientists more effectively so that they are allowed to focus on the science element of EHS work, leaving others to deal with the elements that are more labour-intensive.

Of the additional £2 million that I secured for better regulation of environmental crime, the EHS will allocate £100,000 specifically for work on ASSIs.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her responses to Mr Bresland's questions. The Minister is correct to say that a consultation is under way in Lisnaragh in West Tyrone. There is concern about that. Will the Minister tell the House whether being designated as an ASSI will impact on a valid planning approval that currently exists but which has not yet been activated?

The Minister of the Environment: I believe that a "green form" from the Planning Service will stand, because an ASSI designation will not be retrospective; it will not affect a past decision and will be applied only to future decisions.

Planning Circular PC 03/07

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that planning circular PC 03/07 is being applied in all planning offices. (AQO 3177/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning circular (PC) 03/07 relates to the assessment of planning applications for residential development in urban areas, villages and other small settlements. It was issued to all Planning Service staff in August 2007. Its purpose is to remind development control

staff of the need to ensure that the impact of new residential developments in urban areas, villages and other small settlements is fully considered, in line with existing policies and other material considerations.

That circular was issued after several controversial proposals for the redevelopment of large, single houses or other brownfield sites in cities, towns, and — increasingly — smaller rural settlements, mainly to develop apartments and town houses. That circular is being implemented in all planning offices. From time to time, Planning Service headquarters will draw existing policies to the attention of staff, such as PC 03/07, to ensure that those policies are being implemented properly.

3.15 pm

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her answer. Although the guidelines are helpful, we have seen little or no effect on changing the trend of the overdevelopment of apartments in south Belfast, because the circular has no policy framework to make it effective. Does the Minister plan to consolidate the guidelines into a planning policy statement?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member is right that planning circular 03/07 contains no new policy. After I took office, I decided that the current planning policy must contain provisions to cover the type of development that the Member referred to. The planning officials drew together everything concerning that type of development and published it as planning circular 03/07.

I acknowledge that this issue is of great concern, and I have asked my officials to prepare a paper on policy options to consider the type of issues that Ms Lo talked about, including garden grabbing. I will consider that matter in the next couple of weeks, when I receive that paper.

Mr Spratt: Will the Minister confirm that planning circular 03/07 is being applied to conservation areas and areas of townscape character?

The Minister will be aware of a considerable controversy about a planning application to develop apartments in south Belfast at 66-68 Malone Road. Will she confirm whether the Planning Service applied planning circular 03/07 to the consideration of that application?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for giving me notice of his question, because I would not be able to answer it otherwise. I confirm that planning circular 03/07 is being applied to applications for development of all conservation areas and areas of townscape character. I also confirm that such applications are also judged against other relevant existing plans and policies and other relevant material considerations.

Planning circular 03/07 was not applied to the application for the apartment development at 66-68 Malone Road, Belfast because it had not been published when that application was submitted. The applications for demolition consent in the conservation area and for planning permission for an apartment development at 66-68 Malone Road pre-date the issue of the planning circular.

However, as I said in my answer to Ms Lo, those applications were assessed against a full suite of policies that existed at that time, and which have now been brought together in the form of planning circular 03/07. Therefore, although the planning circular did not exist, the policies did.

Road Safety: Advertisements

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to make new television or radio advertisements on road safety. (AQO 3146/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The processes of developing, updating and refreshing new radio and television advertisements will be ongoing throughout 2008 and into 2009. All of that activity will be guided by research, and will continue to target the major causes of death and serious injury. One area of focus at present, for example, is the issue of pedestrian inattention and the safety of vulnerable pedestrians.

We are also currently producing five new instructional television advertisements that will remind drivers about some important rules of the roads. Furthermore, we are producing 10 new radio edits to update and refresh the existing portfolio of radio material.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for her response. She will be aware that foreign nationals in Northern Ireland account for a disproportionate number of road traffic accidents. What plans does she have to educate foreign nationals who arrive in Northern Ireland about road safety issues?

The Minister of the Environment: That issue of the number of foreign nationals who arrive in Northern Ireland who may not have sufficient knowledge of our road safety issues has been raised with me by a number of MLAs and by local representatives. The Department of the Environment (DOE) has developed five instructional television edits that will provide all drivers with a reminder of the need for attentive driving. Those edits will be translated into four languages — Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Mandarin — and will be distributed to target ethnic community groups by using the broadcast media.

The current portfolio of successful television and radio advertisements has also been translated into those four languages and will be distributed among the

targeted ethnic groups around Northern Ireland. The Department has produced two leaflets; one provides information on the effects of alcohol on driving skills, and the other provides details of courses for drink driving. Hard copies of those leaflets will be issued to the targeted ethnic groups, along with copies of radio and television adverts. Downloadable versions of the leaflets will also shortly be made available on the road safety website.

The Department takes the issue of road safety very seriously, and that is why a suite of concerns is being debated today.

Mr Burnside: Mr Hamilton raised an interesting subject with the Minister. Opinion in the advertising industry on whether the very dramatic — almost blood-curdling — television advertisements are helpful or unhelpful is mixed. If qualitative as well as quantitative research were done on that advertising, it would indicate a certain turn-off factor.

Will the Minister make sure that the advertising agencies that propose the new road-safety advertisements have proper focus groups to undertake qualitative research to ensure that those advertisements reach the right audience? The present weekend advertisement slot times do not hit the target audience, so will she also ensure that appropriate slot times are selected?

The Minister of the Environment: It is difficult to measure the sole or unique contribution that any specific area of road safety, including advertising, makes towards reducing casualties. That is because of a range of interventions and factors, including legislation and education. Advertisements are a very useful tool for improving road safety.

The effectiveness of each road safety campaign is assessed through independent research that is conducted immediately before its launch to establish prevalent attitudes. Research is then undertaken after the launch — and annually thereafter — to determine the effects on public attitudes. Results show that DOE advertising is influential in improving drivers' attitudes and in producing positive changes in behaviour. Therefore the Department will continue with the advertising campaign. We may change the way that it flows, but the advertising campaign has definitely been a success.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. She stole some of my thunder because I was going to ask about the evaluation process and the impact of the advertising campaign. Will the Minister outline whether the tendering for the production of television and radio advertising is done in line with normal and accepted public procurement and tendering procedures?

The Minister of the Environment: There is a very short answer — yes.

Local Councils: Litter Prevention

7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action that she has taken to promote best practice among local councils in relation to preventing litter. (AQO 3081/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are many ways to prevent or reduce litter. The best endeavour to change the attitudes and behaviour of those who are too lazy or who do not care enough to take that extra small step and put their litter in a bin. I am encouraged by the actions that councils are taking to tackle litter problems, such as local awareness campaigns, website information, and — in some cases — litter wardens.

I am sure that many Members have seen the television advertisement campaign entitled: 'Litter, don't drop it; stop it'. That is an excellent example of positive action to encourage litter prevention.

The Department also provides core funding to the TIDY Northern Ireland organisation. That funding allows it to work with district councils on litter issues and allows it to run litter campaigns and programmes. I am encouraged by the findings in TIDY Northern Ireland's latest annual survey, which show an improvement in cleanliness levels for the third year in a row.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for her answer. Since the forced closures of many waste disposal sites — or skip sites as we know them — throughout council areas, will the Minister accept that the incidence of fly-tipping throughout the countryside of Northern Ireland has increased significantly and that some councils appear to have difficulty in dealing with the issue?

The Minister of the Environment: The issue that the Member raised is not strictly a litter issue; it is more of a fly-tipping issue, which is slightly different. Earlier this month, I had a useful meeting with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) working group representatives, during which we discussed various issues, including the fly-tipping problem that the Member mentioned.

I have asked NILGA representatives to consult with their councils and provide me with their priorities for the clean neighbourhood agenda, because I am receiving conflicting views as to what those are. Some say that fly-tipping is the priority, although I have a large postbag relating to high hedges. I am sure that many Members have taken the opportunity to write to me. However, I need to know what the priorities are, and I am hopeful that NILGA will complete its work and respond to me on the subject.

Mr Weir: What co-operation is taking place between the three waste groups, and what action is being taken to help meet targets on the clean-up of waste and litter at that strategic level?

The Minister of the Environment: The Strategic Waste Board has been working well and has a large programme of work. Members may be aware that the board will have to consider a large procurement in the near future to solve the huge landfill waste problems. I hope that the board will take the opportunity to come to Stormont and meet with Members of the House to discuss what needs to be done deal with waste. Frankly, some Members have not grasped what must be done in the coming years to deal with that issue.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat. Taking into account the recent court case in England, does the Minister's Department have any plans to fine householders for overfull bins?

The Minister of the Environment: No. As regards recent media coverage relating to my allowing councils to fine people for putting rubbish into the wrong bins; that is a matter for the 26 local councils: Arlene Foster has not decided that everybody will be fined £100.

The results of a TIDY Northern Ireland survey commissioned by the Environment and Heritage Service came out today, and it received responses from 24 of the 26 local councils in the Province. The findings reveal huge variations in the way in which councils deal with their litter offences. Some councils are simply not dealing with litter, but they need to get on with it, and it is entirely up to them how they deal with the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences

9. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons why breeders who hold licences for showing birds are limited in the number of birds that can be shown, compared to other regions. (AQO 3185/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In Britain, under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, any wild bird that can be shown to have been bred in captivity may be kept and exhibited in competitions. That relaxation of the protected status of captive-bred wild birds was not included in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and, therefore, the keeping and exhibiting of wild birds is allowed only under the terms of a licence issued by the Department.

Article 8 and schedule 4 of the Wildlife Order presently allow for the keeping and exhibition of 15 species of captive-bred wild birds under such licences. The ongoing review of the Wildlife Order, which is at public consultation stage, offers an opportunity for interested organisations to suggest additions to the list of species in schedule 4 or to bring that aspect of the legislation into line with that in Great Britain.

Mr Molloy: Will the Department be recommending a review of the legislation?

The Minister of the Environment: The Wildlife Order has been published for consultation. Interested parties, such as Mr Molloy or anybody else, can suggest additions to the list of species in schedule 4 or bring that aspect of the legislation into line with the rest of the United Kingdom. In doing so, Mr Molloy would then be able to do what he asked in his question.

Mr T Clarke: In relation to the Minister's answer — and maybe I am asking my question on behalf of another Member who has been known to shoot at doves and other birds — are there any implications for sporting interests such as shooting and wildfowl?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member's question relates to those who are involved in aviculture. Although the Department is planning to introduce restrictions on the use of lead shot over wetlands — something that the Members behind me may not be too excited about — and will be consulting on such proposals during May 2008, such proposals are concerned with changing shooting practices and will not affect aviculturists in any way.

3.30 pm

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Peace II Extension

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proposals he has to extend Peace II to dovetail with the start of Peace III. (AQO 3169/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): The Peace II and Peace III programmes are operating in parallel, so there is no gap between the two. Some Peace II themes opened to funding applications in November 2007, and the programme is now fully open. Peace II is still operating, but must close before the end of this year. All Peace II projects that are still operating have specified that they will close between June and September. Peace III is an entirely new program with its own aims and objectives; it is not a continuation of Peace II. Organisations that have received, or are receiving, Peace II funding can propose projects for funding under the new programme. Those proposals will be assessed competitively, using the agreed Peace III selection criteria.

Ms Lo: Given that the Peace III budget is a lot smaller than the previous two tranches, many grass-roots groups that are working on peace and reconciliation projects may not receive further funding beyond the summer. Has the Minister any plans to sustain some of those very worthwhile projects?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As I outlined, the key objectives of Peace II and Peace III are different. The objective of Peace III is reconciliation. Unquestionably, some groups that receive funding under Peace II might well fall within that category, and, therefore, can lodge an application, which will be duly considered against the Peace III criteria. However, when groups applied for Peace II funding, they had to indicate the level of sustainability of their projects, which they knew, at that stage, would end with the end of the Peace II funding. We were very fortunate in getting Peace III funding at all. There were many people who felt that funding would have ended with Peace II.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat. I ask the Minister what steps his Department has taken to advise and inform projects that are funded by Peace II, but which may not receive Peace III funding. I am thinking in particular of projects that deliver essential front-line services in local communities. I also draw the Minister's attention to the looming childcare crisis facing West Tyrone as a result of a gap in appropriate funding.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is a basic misunderstanding of what Peace II and Peace III are about. I will make it very clear: groups applied for Peace II funding in the knowledge that they were applying to a programme that was time limited. They, therefore, lodged their applications and were successful on the basis that they would be able to operate during that period, but, after that, would have to find alternative funding, either through any continuation of Peace funding, or, alternatively, from some of the other statutory organisations. It will be up to those organisations, if they cannot lodge a submission under Peace III, to seek other sources of funding, such as any of the Departments, or from organisations outside of Government.

Mr Kennedy: The Minister knows and has accepted that many organisations that qualified for Peace II funding will not qualify for Peace III funding. Will the Minister advise what actions he is taking to ensure that local organisations take greater advantage of other initiatives within the European Union that may provide an additional source of funding?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) will be happy to assist any organisation that believes that its funding will not be continued and that there might be other European sources of funding. However, we recognise the very significant opportunity represented by Peace III, because it opens up a wider area at a more strategic level for funding in Northern Ireland.

Peace III can provide funding for victims' organisations, for instance, and applications can be submitted right now. Many victims' organisations have benefited from such funding and have already submitted their applications. Under the new requirements of Peace III,

organisations can submit applications to fund reconciliation projects, and they will receive due consideration. If an application is beyond the scope of Peace III, the organisation must seek an alternative source of funding. It can either approach Government or contact staff at the SEUPB, who will be happy to assist.

Bullying and Sexual Harassment

2. **Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to ensure that Government Departments adopt a consistent approach to reducing the number of complaints of (a) bullying; and (b) sexual harassment. (AQO 3211/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: To ensure that harassment and bullying are addressed in a consistent manner, in November 2007, the Northern Ireland Civil Service adopted a single corporate policy and set of procedures called Dignity at Work. A further significant step has been the development of a new mandatory training course, Diversity Now. The course is designed to raise awareness of equality and diversity and to show, in a practical way, how each member of staff can take a stand against inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

Mr Simpson: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will have noticed from recent questions for written answer that the frequency of such complaints varies greatly from one Department to another. Why is that the case, and are there any lessons to be learned from how different Departments have used good or bad practice to tackle the issue?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member has been assiduous in his questioning on the subject. He will have noted from the replies that the number of people who have claimed harassment or bullying in the workplace varies greatly, not only from one Department to another but from year to year. I must also point out that the replies to Mr Simpson show that the number of claims upheld is relatively low in comparison with the number submitted. That indicates that more work may be required to increase understanding in the workplace as to the definitions of “harassment”, “bullying” and “sexual harassment”. Unfortunately, no legal definitions exist and, following consultation, DFP uses its own definition.

Size is one obvious reason for the wide variation in the number of claims: the larger the Department, the greater the likelihood that someone will claim to have been harassed in the workplace. Variations in the age, gender and grades of staff are additional factors in the propensity for such claims to be submitted.

After consulting other Departments and taking legal advice, DFP produced a policy that is of tremendous assistance because, instead of each Department

developing its own criteria, they are all adopting that single policy. A network of harassment contact officers is in place in each Department, and, as a first step, they help staff to resolve informally any problems that they are experiencing in the workplace.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer in relation to complaints of bullying and sexual harassment. I welcome the fact that Diversity Now is in place. Do that policy and the Minister’s Department also cover complaints of homophobic, racist or religious harassment in the workplace?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: If the Member is interested, I can give him the definitions from which DFP works. “Inappropriate behaviour” has the wide-ranging definition of:

“Any form of unwanted, unreasonable and offensive conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”.

The policy continues:

“ Harassment

2.2.1 Harassment is unwanted, unreasonable and offensive conduct that is linked to aspects of a person’s social identity i.e. sex, race/ethnic origin, marital status, religious belief, political opinion, age, disability, sexual orientation or whether or not they have dependants.”

“ Bullying

2.2.2 Where the unwanted conduct is not linked to a person’s social identity then it is often referred to as bullying. There is no legal definition of bullying however, it is generally accepted that bullying comprises of “persistent offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour,”

For those Members who think that that runs very close to what they get from their Chief Whips, there is a let-out clause in that many people will recognise that there are some individuals who feel that an employer persistently telling them to do work and not to do things that are not related to their work can also be regarded as harassment.

Mr Beggs: Are patterns emerging regarding complaints of bullying and sexual harassment and what action is the Minister taking to address any such patterns that show worrying trends in particular Departments and agencies? Furthermore, the Department has settled several cases out of court; can the Minister reassure the Assembly that, as well as learning lessons from court judgements, the Department will ensure that, where appropriate, lessons are learned from out-of-court settlements that are made on behalf of the Department of Finance and Personnel?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is essential that the policy that has been set out by the Department of Finance and Personnel, after consultation with all Departments, is followed at every level of Government. There will always be individuals who

flout that policy, and there will, therefore, always be a requirement for steps to be taken.

As far as patterns are concerned, one or two Departments have a higher level of bullying than others. Where there is a persistent level of harassment or inappropriate behaviour, management and the trade unions will act, as they have a shared view on the problem and can work together to alleviate it.

Stormont Events

3. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the events planned for the Stormont Estate this summer. (AQO 3077/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The following events are planned for 2008: a vintage car rally on 29 April; the Red Bull soapbox derby in late May; the Race for Life in support of breast cancer in early June; The Police pop concert to be held in late June; a Daisy Chain charity event, which will be run by the PSNI on a date to be confirmed; and a teddy bears' picnic in late August, in which I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be interested.

The events calendar for the Stormont Estate changes regularly, with events being added throughout the year. To date, no other major events are planned for 2008; however, further requests are anticipated.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will be aware that the grounds of the Estate are used extensively, primarily by local people, for jogging, walking and dog walking — activities from which much enjoyment is derived. Does the Minister intend to ensure that the Estate is open beyond the current 6.30 pm closing time during the summer months in order to encourage such activity?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The closing time of the Stormont Estate varies throughout the year depending on daylight hours. In winter, as the Member said, the Estate is closed at 6.30 pm; in summer, however, it remains open until 9 pm. Over the years, there have been problems with groups of youths congregating in the Estate after dark. As a result, management closes the park one hour before sunset to ensure the safety of visitors. Therefore, I can confirm that during the summer, the Estate will be open after the 6.30 pm winter deadline and that he, his wife and his dog will be able to walk, jog, or whatever, in the park.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr David McClarty, who, I am sure, is also interested in the teddy bears' picnic.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he confirm whether The Police have been asked to perform at Stormont in order to prepare for the devolution of policing and justice? Will he confirm

whether he will accompany the deputy First Minister to the concert? *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am sure that many people will be delighted that The Police are to perform at Stormont. It is expected that in the region of 20,000 to 35,000 people will attend that event. However, I have not yet worked out my diary for that particular day.

I am pleased that there will be no charge to the public purse as a result of the event. Financially, it will be dealt with completely by the organisers. I hope that all who are involved have a good evening.

As far as the devolution of policing and justice is concerned, the Member knows the position. All unionist parties want those powers to be devolved to Northern Ireland. However, they also want to ensure that the conditions are right for that to happen and that people have confidence, not only in the modalities of how those powers are handled, but in those in whom the responsibilities will be vested.

2011 Census

4. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on preparations for the 2011 census. (AQO 3168/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The next census is planned to take place on 27 March 2011, and there has been formal consultation on the topic content already. Users are being kept informed of current thinking through, for example, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) website and information days. The census office conducted a census test in 2007, and a rehearsal is planned for 2009. Final consultative proposals for the 2011 census will be published later in 2008. Those will be followed by a census Order and regulations in 2010, which will provide the opportunity for full legislative scrutiny.

Mrs Long: In the previous census, 14.2% of the population either did not disclose their religion or followed religions and philosophies other than the Christian religions that were listed on the census. During reallocation, that percentage was reduced to 3.1%. Can the Minister assure the House that such processes will be done away with in favour of respecting the rights and wishes of individual citizens to define their own identities or to keep matters of religion private?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member does not quite understand the purpose of a census. Their whole point is so that we can benefit from the statistics and information that are made available for a range of purposes; not least is that demographic statistics can be benchmarked and used by Government offices to help in developing and monitoring policy. It

is essential that the census presents as clear a picture as possible of that information. Therefore, the Assembly should encourage people to complete the form fully.

The Member will have every opportunity at the consultative stage to give her views on the questions that are on the form. She will also have a further opportunity to do so when the regulations go through the Assembly.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his previous answer. What arrangements have been made for publication of the census findings in languages other than English, including Irish?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I was asked a similar question the previous time that that question found its way on to the list. I pointed out that although the census will be carried out in English, templates will be provided in a range of additional materials, which will include other languages. I pointed out that Irish, Ulster Scots and probably several languages of immigrants' groups in Northern Ireland will be necessary. The range is as large as the requirement. Indeed, I think that it is more important that it includes groups such as Portuguese, Romanians, Poles and others who are not as competent at the use of the English language as those who speak Irish and Ulster Scots.

Mr McFarland: Will the Minister confirm that NISRA will liaise with the Office for National Statistics so that the statistics and patterns emerging from Northern Ireland will be combined with those from the rest of the United Kingdom to give a clear picture of the situation across the whole country?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Yes. The timing and processes are joined up with the rest of nation.

Rates Relief for over 70s

5. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the strategies in place to inform qualifying people over the age of 70 years that they are entitled to rates relief. (AQO 3118/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land and Property Services (LPS) has sought to raise awareness through a number of measures. Those include publicity issued along with the 2008 rate bills in the form of a leaflet on who can get help and how; advertising leaflets providing details of the scheme and the application processes; posters for display in a range of public places, including all Land and Property Services and Northern Ireland Housing Executive offices, GPs surgeries, health centres and credit unions; information and application forms on the Land and Property Services and Housing Executive websites; partnership working with the voluntary and community sector,

including Age Concern, Help the Aged, Citizens Advice and the Consumer Council; working with other Government agencies to raise awareness of the scheme and to update appropriate literature, such as pension service leaflets; press releases to secure coverage about the new scheme; and features about the new allowances on local radio and television programmes. I hope that we can add to that list the Member's question and my answer.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply to my question. I have an equally comprehensive set of further questions, which I want to pose.

First, will the Minister advise the House how many pages of information pensioners will be required to complete to apply for rates relief and to detail what actions his Department is taking to simplify that process.

Secondly, in the rest of United Kingdom, the Pension Service will be passing on details to local authorities to facilitate payment of the council tax benefit later this year. When will there be automatic delivery of rates relief in Northern Ireland using the information that already exists on Government databases? Will the Minister accept that there is a need for automatic rates relief for the over 70s, given that, in a recent Northern Ireland omnibus survey, only 33% of those aged 65 and over indicated that they were prepared to claim help with the payment of rates.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have a copy of the application form, which includes simple questions. The only difficulty is that people might be intimidated by the number of pages providing further information. Answering the questions is simple and straightforward. LPS has done a good job in putting down the key issues, which can be answered quickly. Senior citizens should be able to respond to it; they should not choke up because of the additional information provided to answer any queries.

With regard to automaticity, clearly, as soon as someone has applied and received such a benefit there should be no further application required, and we are looking at ways to achieve that. In the generality of the Member's question, he will be aware that we asked some of the groups concerned — Age Concern, Help the Aged — to carry out a study on issues relating to the take-up of those reimbursements where it is permissible. They have provided a detailed study — in fact, it is one of the best studies that I have seen — which offers a series of options. At present, the Committee for Finance and Personnel is considering those options. Officials in my Department are also conducting a consultation on the policy, and we hope to be able to give further guidance to people to ensure there is appropriate take-up. There is, however, already a high level of take-up.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has, to some degree, answered part of the question that I was going to ask. Will he comment on the recommendations that were made in the take-up study of rates relief and disabled person's allowance? Does he have plans to implement any of those recommendations?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As I said, the report was valuable. It makes a series of recommendations; the Department is considering each of them, and I am certain that a large number will probably be acceptable.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for his comments about addressing the big problem of the low uptake of other benefits, especially from owner-occupiers. As the Minister is working through that problem, does he think that the resource problems that are becoming evident in Land and Property Services, and the reported morale problems, will cause difficulties?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have read some of the stories in 'The Irish News' on problems in LPS. As the Member is aware; when I set up the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU), I announced to the House that I had initially asked it to consider two areas: planning, and the general range of property services. That will do something to improve morale in LPS, as it will indicate the priority that the Executive and the Assembly have for the work that Land and Property Services is carrying out.

PEDU will consider closely whether there are requirements for more personnel to be drafted in, and whether, and when, the IT can be improved. I recognise the difficulties in LPS, which is one of the reasons why I ensured that PEDU would consider it. It is an important area for delivery for the Executive.

Post Offices: Rates Relief

6. **Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will include Post Offices in his consideration of small business rates relief, as undertaken in Wales. (AQO 3141/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) has completed its study into the case for small-business relief. Its report has been published and can be found on ERINI's website and on my Department's rating reform website. The report includes consideration of a scheme that could include post offices, along the lines of the scheme that was introduced in Wales this year.

It is worth noting that I met representatives from the National Federation of SubPostmasters on 21 June 2007. Following that meeting, I asked my Department to ensure that, as part of its research, ERINI would

include post offices in its consideration of options. I understand that during the formative stages of its research, ERINI consulted the National Federation of SubPostmasters and that that body's views are reflected in the ERINI work.

It should also be noted that on 9 April 2008, the Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence from officials in my Department and ERINI. The Committee has already highlighted the importance of the social value of the post office network in rural areas and has asked that I consider that along with options that are intended to fulfil other social objectives before final decisions are made.

One interesting point that emerged from the ERINI report is that it said in reference to the Welsh scheme that:

"If this scheme was duplicated in Northern Ireland, then approximately 459 Post Offices would be covered at an average rate relief of £1,368. The total amount of rate revenue foregone would be in the region of £628,000. It should be noted that this is very much a rough estimate as the LPS valuation data only identifies 304 separate properties as Post Offices while information from the National Federation of Sub Postmasters gives a figure of 543 Post Offices in Northern Ireland. It is thought that the difference is accounted for by Post Offices contained within other properties such as supermarkets".

If we were minded to adopt such a scheme, any decision, as with all new policies of the Assembly, would have to be made in light of an assessment of its effectiveness, alternative ways of providing support and, most importantly, other departmental spending priorities.

Mrs Hanna: I thank the Minister for that helpful and comprehensive answer. I do not know that I even need to ask whether the Department of Finance and Personnel needs to consider any other options; it will take me a while to digest what the Minister said.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My ministerial colleagues in DETI and DARD are examining the ERINI report, and their reviews will enable me to reach a conclusion about whether rate relief is the right way ahead and, if it is, what type of scheme would be affordable and deliver effective support.

4.00 pm

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Funding for Constituency Offices

1. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Assembly Commission what steps it is taking to ensure that the system for funding Assembly Members' constituency offices provides proper protection of public money and is not subject to abuse; and that the amount of money used

for constituency offices can be subject to independent appeal. (AQO 3173/08)

Mr Moutray: Funding for constituency offices is provided through a Member's entitlement to office costs allowance (OCA). All OCA claims must be supported by a Member's signed declaration that the expenditure was wholly, necessarily and exclusively incurred in respect of that Assembly Member's duties. Furthermore, every claim is checked by the Assembly secretariat to ensure that it is within the allowance's remit. Such a check is conducted for every claim made by every Member.

The Commission asked the Senior Salaries Review Body to consider OCA administration in its forthcoming report on Members' salaries and allowances. That report may recommend additional steps to further enhance assurances that public money is being protected and that the system is not open to abuse.

The Commission has no plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism concerning the amount of money used for constituency offices. Members are aware that the OCA in each financial year is limited. It is entirely for each Member to decide how that allowance can be used best to provide a service to constituents. Some Members might decide to use the majority of their allowance to provide support staff salaries, and others might decide to use the majority of their allowance to obtain office accommodation and pay for its associated running costs.

Mr O'Loan: I thank Mr Moutray for his answer. The term "independent appeal" was intended to refer to independent scrutiny, and that meaning is conveyed in the intent and content of Mr Moutray's answer.

I welcome such an answer from the Assembly Commission, because this is the first time that the Commission's accountability role for this matter has been clear to the Assembly and, I imagine, the public. Given that there is widespread concern in the Assembly and, most certainly, among the public, whom we serve and who provide us with the money for such purposes, will the matter now be on the Commission's agenda? I urge the Commission to continue its deliberations and to ensure that full accountability is provided for the public.

Mr Moutray: The Assembly Commission awaits the Senior Salaries Review Body's report on Members' salaries and allowances and will give due consideration to any recommendations that seek to enhance the protection of public money.

Assembly Chamber: Refurbishment

2. **Mr Savage** asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to refurbish the Assembly Chamber. (AQO 3128/08)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: During this summer's recess, the Assembly Commission has put plans in place to refurbish the Assembly Chamber and upgrade the broadcasting equipment and its infrastructure in the Assembly Chamber and the Senate Chamber.

Initially, the Assembly Chamber's refurbishment was to form part of the broadcasting upgrade; however, it has been agreed that the Chamber's refurbishment and the upgrade of the broadcasting equipment and its infrastructure will be treated as two distinct projects.

The Chamber's refurbishment will primarily address ongoing problems relating to audio quality, and the heating and ventilation systems. It will also include the replacement of the temporary Speaker's table, new worktops for Members' desks and the addition of lecterns for the Back Benches. Where possible, infrastructure will be provided to allow for future upgrades and technology.

Accessibility will be improved by creating a level entrance at each end of the Chamber. The internal steps in the Chamber's floor will also be upgraded in order to comply with disability legislation, and the carpet will be replaced.

A key feature of the upgrade will be improved facilities for disabled visitors, including the installation of a platform lift, disabled toilet facilities and the provision of four additional wheelchair spaces in the Public Gallery. Visitor facilities will also be enhanced with an upgraded audio system and the provision of plasma screens in the Galleries, which should enable visitors to feel more integrated and involved with the business on the Floor of the Chamber.

The upgrade to the broadcasting equipment in the Chamber and the Senate, and the associated technical broadcasting infrastructure, will provide a better-quality picture and ensure that out-of-date equipment is replaced with state-of-the-art technology. The Commission is keen to promote its vision of engagement and, with the investment in the Chamber, will ensure that the public is given a better chance to visualise and participate in Assembly business in the Chamber.

Mr Savage: Will the Member outline any other planned facility upgrades for Parliament Buildings that are being discussed by the Assembly Commission?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: All plans are based on having the Chamber upgrade completed during the summer. The contractor will be given possession of the site on Wednesday 2 July, and construction work is scheduled to be completed by Friday 29 August, with two weeks allocated to testing and commissioning. The Commission is content with the progress to date and is assured that the project is on schedule. Other tenders have been issued for the broadcasting equipment and will be evaluated in late April. On appointment, the successful tenderer will be required to liaise closely with the contractors responsible for the construction elements

of the Chamber upgrade. My earlier answer gave an indication of some of the other upgrades that are planned.

Bottled Water

3. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the suppliers of bottled water to the Assembly; and to provide an assurance that bottled water will only be sourced from suppliers in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 3074/08)

Mr Neeson: A variety of water is offered by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission on Assembly premises. The 19-litre plastic bottles that are dispersed throughout the Building at water fountains are sourced from the Classic Mineral Water Company — which is based in Lurgan — and are purchased through the support services contract, which is operated by Eurest.

Glass bottles of still and sparkling water are consumed at Committee meetings and are available from vending machines. Those are provided by Coca-Cola through Deep River Rock, which is based in Lambeg, Lisburn. A 500 ml plastic bottle of water, One Water, is also available from vending machines and the Basement Restaurant. That is a Fairtrade product. Those purchases are made through the support services contract.

The use of local suppliers was at the request of Assembly Commission management, and is consistent with the Assembly Commission's insistence on sourcing local products, where possible. That was a requirement of the Assembly Commission prior to the award of the support services contract. Eurest is committed to sourcing local water products that are suitable for the needs of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr T Clarke: I am pleased to hear that we are supposed to be sourcing water from local producers. However, I am alarmed that the Member forgot to mention that Tipperary Natural Mineral Water is used at some Committee meetings. As far as I am aware, we are still in Northern Ireland, and not the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Neeson: The Assembly Commission has directed Eurest, which holds the contract, to source water locally. We are determined to assist local producers, be that in agriculture or other sectors, so I take the Member's point on board.

Ban on Cameras

4. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Assembly Commission what steps it is taking to remove the ban on all cameras being used in Parliament Buildings. (AQO 3158/08)

Mr A Maginness: Arrangements for photography and filming in Parliament Buildings were revised on 6 March 2008.

Those arrangements stated that no photography or filming was to be allowed in the corridors or in any other area in Parliament Buildings — other than in the Great Hall — without the prior agreement of the Assembly Commission.

Subsequently, at a Commission meeting held on 24 April 2008, it was agreed that those restrictions should be amended. Accordingly, filming and photography will now be permitted in public areas of the Building, provided that the sponsor required was present at application stage and that this satisfied the criteria for the organisation of events.

Filming and photography are also permitted in accommodation relating to Speaker's events and to Commission, Executive and Committee business. Detailed guidance, providing further instructions on the outworking of this decision, will be issued to all Members and to Secretariat staff at the earliest opportunity. The amendments to the rules were agreed to promote the strategic objectives of the Commission on the engagement of and outreach to the community.

Mr O'Dowd: The objective of the Commission to be open and transparent to the public is being hindered by those rules. If I saw someone taking a photograph in the hall outside a senior Minister's office, should I report it to the Commission? I ask the Assembly Commission to review that rule and allow the media and the public full and open access to Parliament Buildings.

Mr A Maginness: The rules have been amended and the Commission will keep them under consideration. I note the point that the Member made, and I am certain that the Commission will attempt, in due course, to accommodate his points.

Mr Ford: Mr Maginness referred to the revision of the recent March rules with regard to photography. The March rules also included the requirement that events be authorised by three different Members, including one from each of the two principal designations. Has the Commission taken a view on the equality aspects of that decision? At present, members of the United Community Group require two signatures from outside their group — and from the two designations — while all other Members require only one signature from outside their own group.

Mr A Maginness: There was some discussion on that issue at the last Commission meeting; it was raised by a Commission Member and also in a letter from the Chief Whip of the Member's group. The Commission will endeavour to address the Member's points.

Mr Ross: During the period of the ban on photography and filming in Parliament Buildings, how many individual MLAs or Committees sought permission from the Commission to film in restricted areas of the Building?

Mr A Maginness: That is not a question that I can answer at present. However, the Commission will provide a written response to the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn; and the Member is not in her place to ask question 6. That concludes Questions to the Assembly Commission. We now return to the debate on Raymond McCord Jnr.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with grave concern the report of the Police Ombudsman into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr and related matters; applauds the work of the McCord family's campaign for justice; supports the ongoing criminal investigation into these matters; and calls on all individuals and organisations to co-operate fully with the Police Ombudsman and PSNI investigations.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the constructive and mature debate that has taken place thus far on the motion. The contributions have acknowledged the serious nature of the Police Ombudsman's report and demonstrate that a light must be shone into the murky dealings of our past.

Nelson McCausland's contribution demonstrates what appears to be a dawning realisation across the unionist community that the report might not be a one-off. It has shown that dirty deals were done in the past — in our name, I hasten to add.

4.15 pm

The Police Ombudsman made a series of recommendations in the report, and I am pleased to say that the majority of them have been, or are being, implemented. The outworkings of the ombudsman's balanced report and the tenacity and courage of Raymond McCord Snr have been of service to the community in that they have improved policing and ensured that the mishandling of agents cannot happen again — at least not in policing. The SDLP will continue to raise concerns about national security and the lack of oversight of agents that are handled by MI5. The SDLP will not be rolling over on that issue.

The Police Ombudsman's report details the previous reports of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, which failed to recognise how agents were handled and make recommendations on how they should be handled. Therefore there is little confidence in that methodology being introduced in the future. My party will raise that issue in the House; in private with the British and Irish Governments; and at Westminster.

I also welcome the call from right across the community for all people to take responsibility for aiding the criminal investigations in the past. The victims issue has been central in recent weeks, and we all must share the onerous responsibility of addressing it properly, which means dealing with the past truthfully.

I note that the leader of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, spoke a great deal about the need for truth. It is incumbent upon him and his party colleagues to tell the truth about their paramilitary wing, the IRA, and the part that it played. It was little over four years ago that the remains of Jean McConville, who was horrifically

murdered, were found on a beach. It is still much to my party's regret, my personal regret, and, I am sure, the regret of the family of Jean McConville, that the IRA has yet to apologise or show any remorse for the murder of a mother, whose children were left orphaned.

That is only one example of the need to deal with the past. Families search not only for truth, but for justice. We now realise that, in many cases, there is little chance of justice resulting from any of our deliberations on the past — as many Members have said, some of the perpetrators may have died in recent years. However, there are many people at large in society who know much about the truth of the past, and they have a responsibility to at least go some way towards meeting the needs of victims and survivors in getting to the truth.

Establishing the truth is not just about giving some peace of mind to those who have survived terrible atrocities; it is also about getting this matter right so that we can promote reconciliation and learn lessons from our divided past. In that way, we can collectively ensure that events of the past cannot happen again. Central to our ambition to build a new and shared future is the need to acknowledge the truth of what happened. I once heard a story of how loyalist paramilitaries were wrongfully blamed for the murder of a Catholic man. His grandchildren have only recently found out that the murder was perpetrated by the IRA. This man's children and grandchildren have grown up to hate Protestants simply because the truth was not told about that murder, and they also suffer the deep wounds caused by that loss.

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

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too welcome the debate. For very good reasons, it has mostly focused on one particular example of collusion — the cruel murder of Raymond McCord Jnr.

Engaging in the political process of the Assembly will sometimes require us to deal with challenging issues. Members have quickly realised that it is impossible to ignore the consequences of our conflicted past or confine our energies to feel-good issues. There are also some difficult and neuralgic issues.

Members have rightly acknowledged the tireless, dedicated and fearless work of Raymond McCord Snr in campaigning to uncover and expose the truth about state-sanctioned collusion. He has done a service for all, and he has helped the case and the cause of other families seeking justice through the discovery or recovery of truth.

Mr McCord has done a further service in achieving what I think will be unanimous support for the motion. He has dealt with an issue that often, understandably, stirs people's tribal instincts. No side of this debate is

free of the consequences of our history. Rather than focusing on the mote in our opponent's eye, we should accept that we all have motes and issues of our own with which to deal. Raymond McCord Snr has opened the possibility for others with similar cases to come forward with issues that can, should and must be dealt with, and to apply the experience that he has gained.

Recently we have seen how what should be a unifying issue — Victims' Commissioners — failed to unite Members. Instead, it exposed existing fault lines and proved that for some the conflict continues, albeit in a different form. However, it need not be like that; we need not proscribe every well-intentioned initiative in order to prevent us from achieving an objective. The same applies in relation to collusion.

A learned British judge once described as an "appalling vista" the involvement and the role of British security and prosecution services in framing people.

This case also reveals an "appalling vista". The issues must be addressed to reconcile our conflicted past and replace the pain and trauma that we have endured or caused each other with a peaceful and democratic future.

Let me say to supporters of policing that I have never believed and do not believe that every single member of the RUC was involved in collusion, sectarian activities, hate crimes or repressing the rights of others. I have never subscribed to that notion, because it simply is not true.

It is not possible, though, to find the new space and the new peace that we are seeking if we constantly deny the faults within our own political traditions and backgrounds. This is conflict resolution, which will eventually lead to reconciliation between our communities and across our society. We have to give a lead. To that end, I hope that Raymond McCord's initiative, commitment and dedication to his cause has inspired us all. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate the SDLP for the motion and welcome the debate.

It is a very sensitive issue and important in that it discusses what has gone on, particularly in the loyalist community. Mr McCord is to be congratulated for standing up on behalf of his son to try to uncover the truth about what happened.

The report of the former Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, is very important. She took a courageous stand in exposing the truth. For the first time, Mr McCord has managed to get a straightforward report that details clearly what happened. There was straightforward collusion between loyalist paramilitaries, police handlers and agents. Nuala

O'Loan highlighted what our party had been highlighting for years but what many other parties did not believe and simply put down as PR and propaganda. Regardless of the parties that we represent, we must all recognise that there was collusion and there were covert operations in various lines in the British security forces. They were engaged in collusion to kill Irish nationalists, North and South of the border. Also, some sections of the gardaí and the Government colluded in a cover-up from the highest level of the British Cabinet to ensure that certain actions were carried out and that any investigations that could have unveiled the truth were covered up.

Some would say that things that used to happen in the RUC could not happen in the future. I do not believe that, because Hugh Orde is still trying to stifle and hold up inquests. With the new era of policing, it should be easy for him in his new role to open up files and to co-operate with families who wish to have inquests into the deaths of their loved ones. Those inquests could be given the go-ahead, and Hugh Orde could instruct the PSNI to get involved and to co-operate fully with those investigations.

The report sends out a clear message about collusion and murder. There are many such cases in loyalist and unionist communities and in republican and nationalist communities. There must be more inquiries and cases reopened, because in many cases the truth of what happened has not been uncovered. In an area of my constituency of Mid-Ulster that is known as the "murder triangle", murders were committed and there was collusion at the highest levels in the RUC. However, those were covered up, and there were no proper investigations into them, mainly because senior RUC men actually organised the collusion.

In the Moy, Sergeant Dodds, who was a local sergeant, was one of the main organisers who co-ordinated the RUC Reserve, the UDR and loyalist paramilitaries. Some sections of his RUC squad in the Moy carried out many of those murders and colluded with others to ensure that they were covered up and that there was no investigation. Therefore, we need to get to the truth of what happened. Any attempts by others to try to silence those who seek the truth must be condemned, because we want the truth from all sections of the community. In particular, we want the truth for the families, because they need to know what happened.

I commend Raymond McCord for the stance that he has taken and for the activities that he has exposed.

Dr Farry: The Member said that we need the truth from all sections of the community. Does that include the IRA giving a full account of its actions in Northern Ireland over the past 35 years?

Mr Molloy: Even the Alliance Party should understand that all sections of the community means all sections of the community — it does not exclude anyone. All means all. The truth should come out. I hope that the Alliance Party would co-operate with the rest of us to ensure that the RUC comes clean, exposes what happened and co-operates with the families who are seeking investigations so that the truth can be exposed.

Ms Purvis: When the Police Ombudsman released her 2007 report on the investigation into the circumstances of the death of Raymond McCord Jnr, society was shocked by its contents. However, the Progressive Unionist Party and I were not surprised. The late David Ervine consistently and continually raised with Government Ministers and Secretaries of State — from 1992 or 1993 onwards — the manipulation of some loyalist paramilitaries by RUC Special Branch. We consistently demanded an investigation and, although the dogs on the street knew the truth, Secretaries of State and Government Ministers did not seem to notice.

The report highlights the failure of some RUC Special Branch handlers to uphold law and order and to perform their duties with integrity and honesty. That failure allowed informants to, literally, get away with murder. I am disappointed that so few unionists are in the Chamber to contribute or listen to the debate. When the report was released, I said that the unionist community needed to wake up and smell the coffee; they needed to lift the rocks and look underneath. Those in working-class loyalist areas know the truth — and it is indefensible.

I want to put on record — as the Police Ombudsman did at the time — that I welcome the changes made by the PSNI since 2003 to secure effective management of covert human intelligence sources. The Policing Board must ensure that those recommendations are implemented and reviewed regularly. The report has had ramifications for wider society and has challenged how we collectively deal with the past. Although the House has not yet reached consensus, I look forward to further debate on that matter.

My party has consistently condemned threats against or intimidation of the McCord family. Although we do not agree entirely with the family's approach, the killers of Raymond McCord Jnr must face justice. I encourage those with the ability to assist the police with their investigations to do so.

Mr Attwood: I apologise for missing the first part of the debate — I was returning from a meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in Wexford. My colleagues have given me a flavour of the debate before Question Time, and, therefore, I will respond to some points.

During such a debate, it is appropriate to acknowledge the McCord family and other families in our society such as the Finucane family; the Quinn family; the McCartney family; families from the Ballymurphy area; families affected by Bloody Sunday; and, most recently, Gavin Larmour, the son of a murdered police officer — all of whom have spoken truth to power. They represent the position that society should be in, and highlight where it has failed in the past.

I acknowledge — as Dolores Kelly did — that there is a difference in the tone and substance of this debate, compared with the tone employed during similar recent debates, and I commend Members for that.

It might indicate that, not only do we need a corrective response to some of the recent debates on victims' issues; but we need a corrective measure in wider society to acknowledge that we all should oppose the individuals, elements and state organisations that were responsible for grave error and dangerous policy in the past.

I will make one or two comments on events that have transpired since the then Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, published her report. There have been two material changes since the publication of that report that are important to note, and Dolores Kelly touched upon them.

First, since the report was published, it has been confirmed that all payments to all agents in the employ of Special Branch in the RUC, as it then was, came directly from MI5, the Security Service. It is inconceivable that MI5 was unaware of what certain agents might have been doing in respect of the McCord murder, other murders and other criminal activities that even Dawn Purvis hinted at. If we are to uncover the truth about what happened to Raymond McCord Jnr and about many past events, the truth about what MI5 knew — for it surely knew — must also be exposed.

Secondly, as a retired police officer who might have an interest in the matter has said, the strategic direction of Special Branch/RUC intelligence was set by Whitehall. I do not know whether that is an attempt to wash hands, but it is a serious allegation. If it is the case that the strategic direction of Special Branch intelligence activities in the days of the RUC was set by Whitehall, then that must be probed and exposed.

The final words of the motion deliberately state the need for:

“individuals and organisations to co-operate fully with the Police Ombudsman and PSNI investigations.”

That is not specific to the McCord case. The motion calls on all individuals and organisations to co-operate. That point was deliberately included, because there was a failure to co-operate at the heart of Operation Ballast, for whatever reasons — and there are disputes

in the Chamber, as elsewhere, about what those reasons might have been. If individuals continue to fail to co-operate, the McCord family's campaign for justice will be denied.

The principle of co-operation extends well beyond the McCord case, because we have recently seen further evidence of the British Government's failure to live up to their responsibilities by refusing to implement the independent judicial review into the murder of Patrick Finucane that the Cory Report recommended. In that case, the British Government are failing to co-operate with the search for justice and with the need for a public, independent tribunal.

Similarly, in this phase of politics, the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past is beginning to consider what it might recommend in the next four or five months, and we must co-operate fully with its recommendations. Recently, I asked OFMDFM to confirm that it would recommend that all groups and individuals should co-operate fully, in all matters, with the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past. A few days ago, I got a vague reply, which failed to say definitively and categorically, on its behalf and on behalf of everybody in Northern Ireland, that there needed to be full co-operation.

The Finucane and McCord families have suffered from the failure of certain individuals and groups to co-operate fully in exposing the past. If the Eames-Bradley group suffers in the same way, the truth of the past will not become known.

Stephen Farry talked about the sacrifice of police officers; Mitchell McLaughlin touched on a similar theme. Irrespective of our differing views on the nature of the RUC — and the conduct of individuals and elements in the RUC — and the wider security apparatus, no-one should take away from the sacrifice of those officers who died and were injured, or detract from the burden of pain that their families continue to endure. As Stephen Farry has done, I acknowledge the price that those individuals and families have paid. Evidence suggests that part-time officers, in particular, were targeted — on dark nights, in their homes and at their places of work — disproportionately. That was a cynical and deliberate strategy.

I understand that Jennifer McCann questioned what the SDLP had done on the matter in Lisburn City Council. I do not want to dwell on the matter but the Sinn Féin motion — proposed at that meeting — highlighted collusion and stated:

“further calls on the British government to acknowledge its role in employing this policy during its ‘Dirty War’ in Ireland.”

Ms J McCann: Does the Member agree with the first part of the Sinn Féin motion that was proposed at that meeting of Lisburn City Council? Will the Member read out the whole motion?

Mr Attwood: The first part of the motion refers to collusion, and the second part refers to the British Government's "'dirty war' in Ireland."

Ms J McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: No, I have given way to the Member already.

Contrast that Sinn Féin motion with the balanced and sensitive wording of the SDLP motion. Is the Sinn Féin motion that was proposed at Lisburn City Council likely to unite or divide people? Does it cover all the relevant issues, or was it partial in its dealing with the truth of the past? Why would anybody — especially unionist parties — sign up to a motion that refers to the British Government's "'Dirty War' in Ireland"? A matter of days ago, Lisburn City Council passed a motion — one endorsed by the SDLP, and spoken by our councillor, Matthew McDermott — which deleted that provocative and aggressive content.

We are at very important stage in our history, when victims and survivors must be placed at centre stage. The McCord family has helped to put victims and survivors at centre stage. I welcome all-party support for the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with grave concern the report of the Police Ombudsman into the death of Raymond McCord Jnr and related matters; applauds the work of the McCord family's campaign for justice; supports the ongoing criminal investigation into these matters; and calls on all individuals and organisations to co-operate fully with the Police Ombudsman and PSNI investigations.

Adjourned at 4.43 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 29 April 2008

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker
[Mr McClarty] in the Chair).*

Members observed two minutes' silence.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members have a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments, detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the Speaker's provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are two groups of amendments, and we shall debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on the 13 amendments that are listed in group 1. Those amendments relate to the number of local government districts and the determination of their boundaries. The second debate will be on the five amendments that are listed in group 2. Those amendments concern the rules that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will have regard to in making recommendations.

I remind Members who intend to speak that, during the debates on the two groups of amendments, they should address all the amendments in each group on which they wish to comment. Members must address the subject matter of the debate in question.

Once the initial debate on each group is completed, any subsequent amendments in the group will be moved formally as we debate the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Questions on clauses to stand part of the Bill will be put at the appropriate points. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Clause 1 (Local Government Districts and Wards)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate: amendment No 1, with which it will be convenient to debate amendments Nos 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17 and 18.

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 1, line 3, leave out "11" and insert "15".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 1, page 1, line 3, leave out "11" and insert "at least 11 and not more than 15 new". — *[Mr Gallagher, Mr McGlone.]*

No 3: In clause 1, page 1, line 4, leave out subsection (2) and insert

"(2) The 15 local government districts shall incorporate, respectively, the whole or the major part of the following former local government districts —

1. Ards.
2. Armagh.
3. Ballymena.
4. Belfast.
5. Coleraine.
6. Cookstown.
7. Craigavon.
8. Derry.
9. Down.
10. Fermanagh.
11. Lisburn.
12. Newry and Mourne.
13. Newtownabbey.
14. North Down.
15. Omagh."

— *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 4: In clause 1, page 1, line 4, leave out subsection (2) and insert

"(2) The 11 local government districts shall incorporate, respectively, the whole or the major part of the following former local government districts —

1. Ballymena.
2. Belfast.
3. Coleraine.
4. Cookstown.
5. Craigavon.
6. Derry.
7. Fermanagh.
8. Lisburn.
9. Newry and Mourne.
10. Newtownabbey.
11. North Down."

— *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 5: In clause 1, page 1, line 4, leave out subsection (2) and insert

"(2) The new local government districts shall incorporate the former local government districts." — *[Mr Gallagher, Mr McGlone.]*

No 6: In clause 1, page 1, line 5, leave out “the major”. — *[Mr Kennedy, Mr Beggs, Mr Gardiner, Mr Armstrong.]*

No 7: In clause 2, page 2, line 16, leave out “11” and insert “15”. — *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 8: In clause 2, page 2, line 16, leave out “11 districts mentioned” and insert

“new local government districts as referred to”. — *[Mr Gallagher, Mr McGlone.]*

No 9: In clause 2, page 2, line 26, leave out “11” and insert “15”. — *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 10: In clause 2, page 2, line 26, leave out “11 districts mentioned” and insert

“new local government districts as referred to”. — *[Mr Gallagher, Mr McGlone.]*

No 16: In clause 2, page 2, line 32, leave out “40” and insert “25”. — *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 17: In long title, leave out “11” and insert “15”. — *[Mr Ford, Dr Farry.]*

No 18: In long title, leave out “11” and insert

“at least 11 and not more than 15 new”. — *[Mr Gallagher, Mr McGlone.]*

The debate we are having this morning, and may potentially have in one week’s time, illustrates the problem of accelerated passage. The House is faced with a number of amendments, and in many cases the intention across different amendments is consistent but the precise wording is in conflict. It would have been beneficial to refer the Bill to Committee Stage, which need not have been particularly long. That would have given the Environment Committee the opportunity to examine the phrasing of the amendments and perhaps seek consensus within that Committee on the way forward.

When the Minister was speaking during the Final Stage of the Taxis Bill, she referred to the benefits of the Committee and the Minister working together on 50 agreed amendments. It is sad that she turned down her irony indicator that day, as I said. We are left in the difficult position of dealing with a batch of amendments that do not fit together. I shall do my best to address them all.

The first amendment is simply to change the number of councils proposed from 11 to 15. The Minister previously argued, in her usual eloquent way, that the power that will be given to district councils will increase their expenditure by around 25%. The problem is that 25% of a very small figure, around 5%, is barely 1%.

If we look back to what happened in the 1970s, approximately 70% of the spending power of district and county councils was removed and given to Departments. We are now faced with the fact that, having reduced spending power from 100% to 30%, we are increasing it to somewhere between 35% and

37%. It is pretty small beer to make such a fuss about, as though this was going to be a major change in the role and function of councils. The idea that we will be examining powers further one year from now does not suggest that the Executive, in agreeing this pattern and these powers, has actually got a detailed, considered view of the way ahead. It looks much more like a short-term fudge.

A number of models were floated in previous consultations — nine models, concerning three configurations each of seven, 11 and 15 councils. It is now quite clear that the possibility of having seven councils has been ruled out, even by the one party whose Members previously supported it.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Ford: There has been no specific consultation following general consultation as to whether we should be considering model 11b, or whether the views previously expressed by most parties and councillors that there should be 15 councils described a better way forward. There has been a very modest increase in powers created. My colleague Brian Wilson previously suggested that if this is all councils are getting, we might as well keep the current 26. I am not advancing that case this morning. The House decided when Second Stage was passed that there will be reforms.

There are real issues as to why the number of councils needs to be explored in greater detail. If I were trying a modest grovel in the direction of the Minister, I would suggest there are issues like the Fermanagh factor. Having as few as 11 councils would make it impossible for a county with a separate identity, but a population of just under 60,000, to have its own council. People in that county, at least, will argue strongly that 11 is an inadequate number. On that basis, we have put forward an amendment that there should be 15 councils, since that was the preferred option of most Members at the time the consultation took place. The opinion of the House should be tested on that matter.

Amendments 3 and 4 are in a different area. They deal with the definition of how the new boundaries will be created. In the early 1970s, when the Parliament of Northern Ireland was working out the new arrangements under the Macrory Review, the Bill presented in that House, and passed unamended in that arena, did not specify a complete list of places that would be included within each district council.

Rather, it gave a single defining point for each of the 26 councils. What is now Antrim Borough Council was defined by reference to saying that it would include all, or the major part, of Antrim urban district electoral division of Antrim rural district council.

The other part of my constituency was defined on the basis that it would include all, or the major part, of

Newtownabbey urban district. It did not list Newtownabbey urban district, Ballyclare urban district and part of Antrim rural district. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 did not state that your area, Mr Deputy Speaker, would include Coleraine borough, Coleraine rural district, Portstewart urban district and Portrush urban district. It merely specified Coleraine as the central area of that configuration.

There will be problems if we proceed to list a number of councils and say that all, or a major part, of them will be included. We will continue with the problem of what is now known as the little “bent banana” — the skittering round the southern suburbs of Belfast from Dundrod to Drumbeg to Dundonald. That does not give logic. It would be more logical to provide a defining point of Lisburn and allow the appropriate area of Castlereagh to be included with other parts, perhaps, of Belfast and parts of greater North Down — as Mr Weir calls it — or greater Ards — as his colleague Mr Shannon calls it. It may be argued that the definition of “the major part” is 50% — or more — of the land area; and that may be adequate. However, a reference to “the major part” implies that at least a significant part of that borough will be included, but there are other cases where it might not fit.

A parochial example relates to what might be called the East Antrim question, which was introduced by Roy Beggs when the Bill received its Second Stage. The projected models 15b and 15c show a configuration of Newtownabbey, Larne and Carrickfergus councils in one group and Antrim and Ballymena in another. However, model 11b groups those councils in configurations of Newtownabbey and Antrim together, and Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus in another group. I have worked as a social worker for the Northern Health and Social Services Board in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey districts as well as in Antrim and Ballymena districts. Many people think that it would be logical to make two councils from those five, and to do so from a mid Antrim/east Antrim variation rather than in the manner that is proposed in the Bill — and which is derived from model 11b.

If, as has been said by the Minister and her supporters, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner — and not the House — defines boundaries, it is logical that we should leave it as open as possible to the Boundaries Commissioner to decide the easiest and best way of doing it; to consider how local social and economic needs can be met; and to examine what model will fit the pattern that people are used to. In that context, our amendment to define Newtownabbey and Ballymena as two points — one in each council — and to leave it to the Boundaries Commissioner to decide the best way to fit the boundaries, is more

logical than the method the Minister has decided on by opting for model 11b.

There has been no suggestion as to why model 11b is better than models 15b or 15c in the mid Antrim/east Antrim area. I accept that there may be a slight procedural issue, and it may take longer to implement. Furthermore, there may be a need for a preliminary view on the external boundaries of each council published in advance of the provisional recommendations. If Members feel that there is merit in such an approach, it could be addressed at the Bill’s Further Consideration Stage, and it would be an informal issue.

If we proceed with the Bill as it stands — and assuming that the House rejects the 15-council model, which has, implicit in it, the point of defining a single place, as was the pattern in 1972 — we will run into major difficulties, and the Boundaries Commissioner will be left to produce a set of recommendations that will have significant and long lasting debate around the external boundary of the district, and not merely about the internal ward arrangements. That will create difficulties, which will mean that the timescale, which is supposed to be set, will become less meaningful.

10.45 am

Amendments Nos 7, 9 and 17 are all consequential to amendment No 1, which is the proposal for 15 councils. Amendment No 16 is effectively consequential to amendment No 1. That amendment would change the number of councillors in each local authority from 40, plus or minus five, to 25, plus or minus five. It is designed to maintain the same number of councillors whether there are 11 or 15 councils. That amendment is proposed only on the basis of there being 15 councils; therefore, if amendment No 1 is not passed we will not move amendment No 16.

The SDLP and the Ulster Unionist amendments are largely seeking to achieve the same objectives as those in our amendments. Both parties recognise the Executive’s failure to win support for the proposed 11b model.

The Alliance Party believes that there is merit in testing the waters by having 15 councils. I accept that, in amendment No 2, the SDLP is suggesting having a range of between 11 and 15 councils. Certainly, if amendment No 1 is not passed, the Alliance Party will be supporting amendment No 2. We believe that, given the time constraints, that amendment is slightly too loose, but it nonetheless has significantly more merit than ramming through a proposal for 11 — and only 11 — councils. The vagueness of amendment No 2 is unfortunate, but allowing the issue to be tested by the Boundaries Commissioner rather than having a model rammed through is an option that should be considered.

Amendment No 6 appears to meet very similar concerns to those that are dealt with by the Alliance Party amendments Nos 3 and 4, as they all concern the

way that individual authorities are defined. We see considerable merit in amendment No 6 but it is not quite as good as our own.

Mr Ross: Although this is the first opportunity to debate amendments to the Bill, many of the arguments that we will hear today have been rehearsed during the Second Stage debate. I welcome the fact that the Members who are inclined to change the Bill have the opportunity to do so today. Indeed, allowing amendments to be tabled may produce an improved Bill, and that is the purpose of that process. However, I do not believe that any of the tabled amendments will improve the Bill; rather, they will complicate and confuse the process.

As I argued during the Second Stage debate, the real choice that we had was not between having either 11 or 15 councils, but between having either seven or 11 councils. Certainly, I believe that having 11 councils is preferable to the model that was originally supported by direct rule Ministers as well as by the party opposite.

We can all agree that local government needed to be modernised, and the Executive have agreed on the 11-council model. The grouped amendments that we are debating during this section of the Consideration Stage do not aim to amend that Bill so much as to radically change it.

The Assembly must have the ability to determine the future of local government. Although an independent Boundaries Commissioner can have a say on what the boundaries of various councils should be, the Assembly should be able to determine the number of councils that should exist, and I believe that we have now been able to do that. The review of public administration debate has gone on long enough and finally we are getting somewhere with it. To argue that, after six years, there has not been enough consultation on the matter seems quite bizarre to me.

It would be virtually impossible to come up with a model that all Members would approve of. Even if we could agree on the number of councils, I am sure that there would not be agreement on what the boundaries of those should be, whether because of self-preservation concerns or for other interests. Indeed, during his opening remarks, Mr Ford referred to the East Antrim question about the grouping of Larne, Carrick and Ballymena. However, many of the services for people living in Larne — such as Planning Service or Roads Service — are already provided in Ballymena, so a linkage between those areas already exists.

Neither should the Assembly decide what area should become the administrative headquarters for the proposed new councils, as seems to be proposed in amendment No 4. The new councils will be given new powers and should also be given the opportunity to decide such matters for themselves, and I am quite

sure that there will be some interesting debate about where councils should be centred.

I do not believe that any of the amendments in this grouping improve the Bill, and I consider many of them to be impractical. I urge the House to vote against the amendments.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I oppose the amendments, which show that other parties cannot abide the fact that an agreement has been reached in the interests of delivering — in a timely fashion and after proper and appropriate consideration by a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner with the local communities — fair, effective and efficient local government by 2011.

In many ways, the amendments are contradictory. David Ford talked about the Alliance Party's preferred option being 15 councils. However, he then proposed amendments that deal with everything including the number of councillors, and that are aimed at redefining the wards in advance of the commissioner's doing his work. He went on to say that if his amendments are not accepted he will support the SDLP's amendments, which call for anything between 11 and 15 councils. Members can take from that what they want.

It is unfortunate that the parties that have proposed the amendments are showing, yet again, that they are not serious about the substantive changes that are required at local government level. Accelerated passage has already been granted by the Assembly, and Consideration Stage provides an opportunity for amendments to be proposed and even agreed. However, what we have heard this morning has been a rehearsal of the same arguments that have been rejected so far. I presume that that is what we will continue to hear for the rest of the morning.

The amendments expose the lack of substance in the thinking of the other parties. Many of the amendments are about the numbers of councils and the number of councillors. They have nothing to do with the way in which local government will function. Furthermore, they have nothing to do with striking a balance with the communities across the new council boundaries. They expose the fact that the other parties do not have credible arguments or even any cohesion to their arguments.

One of the arguments that we have heard in recent years, and even in recent weeks, has been that reducing the number of councils will create a distance between the councillors and the local community. However, one of the amendments is aimed at reducing the number of councillors from 40 to 25. Is that not a contradiction?

Mr Ford: It might have helped the Member had he listened to what I said earlier. I made the specific point that the amendment aimed at reducing the number of members of each council from 40 to 25 is in the context of increasing the number of councils, so the

number of councillors remains the same. Had the Member listened to that point, I do not think that he would have made the argument that he just did.

Mr A Maskey: I did listen to the point, and I have done so repeatedly. I have listened to the Alliance Party speaking about that matter for years. The Member will be aware that we have been diligent in this matter for some years; we have listened attentively to what he and his colleagues have said, not only here, but also in the meetings of the strategic leadership board and in the original task force. Therefore, Sinn Féin is well versed in the Alliance Party's position. I was simply rehearsing the point that we have been advised by the Alliance Party and by others that we should not make changes to boundaries that create a further, unacceptable distance between councillors and local communities. However, one of the amendments is seeking to do just that by reducing the number of councillors.

As the Minister of the Environment has said, the changes to the boundaries are part of a process. A lot of work is required in the years ahead, not only in changing the nature of local government, but also in addressing the issue of the number of quangos. To accept that amendment would leave us in a position in which we would still have a ridiculous number of people who were publicly appointed, but a reduced number of local councillors. That would simply create a further electoral deficit.

In future, addressing the number of quangos and the number of public appointees who are unaccountable — they are certainly unelected — will provide a greater opportunity to consider the number of councillors.

Sinn Féin believes that the agreements that have been reached thus far provide a solid foundation upon which local government can be rebuilt in a fair, effective and balanced manner. None of the amendments would help us in the work that we have to do.

Many of the provisions that the amendments call for are included in one way or another in the current commissioner's mandate. Therefore, the amendments add nothing; they simply expose the fact that other parties do not agree with the model for 11 councils. They want 15 — or, if they cannot get 15, they will accept 12, 13 or 14.

That is no way for parties that are opposed to the Bill to show any integrity in respect of being credible, thoughtful and considerate, or having desired outcomes in mind. Sinn Féin opposes the amendments.

Mr Kennedy: I support amendment No 6. The Bill provides the legislative foundation for the complete reform of local government in Northern Ireland. When the number and the basic scope of the new local government units are established, the Bill will potentially shape the way in which people interact with their local

authorities for decades. Ultimately, the Bill will shape how people interact with one another — either reconfirming local identities or forging new ones, as the Bill demands. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that we get this right.

The Ulster Unionist Party has consistently supported a 15-council model, because that best reflects the identities and communities that currently exist in Northern Ireland. Identities and affinities are extremely important in creating good local government and ensuring that communities are adequately equipped and enthusiastic.

Mr Weir: I appreciate that the Ulster Unionist position on the 15-council model has been made fairly clear in the House. However, unlike the Alliance Party and the SDLP, why has the Ulster Unionist Party not tabled any amendments that argue for a 15-council model?

Mr Kennedy: The Ulster Unionist Party has consistently supported the concept of a 15-council model. It is for others to decide whether they also support that concept.

By mirroring the parliamentary boundaries, the 15-council model would lead to the least confusion. It would increase the level of local community buy-in to the democratic process. For those reasons — and others that my colleagues will expand on — the Ulster Unionist Party is minded to support the Alliance Party amendments that seek to change the number of local government districts to 15.

However, although the Ulster Unionists are supportive of the Alliance Party's efforts to change the number of districts to 15, we are also realistic. As Mr Alex Maskey confirmed to the House during his contribution, the deal has already been done between Sinn Féin and the DUP. By tabling amendment No 6, the Ulster Unionist Party is simply trying to make the best possible legislation out of the Bill in the short time that has been allowed.

This Bill has two major clauses. The first establishes that there should be 11 new council areas. It then identifies those council areas, precisely based on an amalgamation of the existing 26 council districts. Clause 1(1) of the Bill is quite precise in stating:

“The 11 local government districts shall incorporate, respectively, the whole or the major part of” —

— the suggested local government areas.

The second major clause of the Bill outlines the powers and the role of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, who will decide the exact boundaries of the local government units and wards. However, the powers that the commissioner has been given are much more limited than they should be. They are much more limited than the powers of the commissioner's counterparts in England. In Northern Ireland, he or she will

not be able to explicitly take into account people's local identities and affinities. That will influence the efficiency of local government. I will return to that issue later.

The Bill details the boundaries of the local government areas in clause 1, but does not explicitly give the commissioner reasonable powers and flexibility to make reasoned changes to those boundaries in clause 2.

The Ulster Unionist Party has tabled amendment No 6, which requests that the words "the major" are left out when the scope of the 11 new units is considered. If the amendment is carried, the legislation will read:

"The 11 local government districts shall incorporate, respectively, the whole or part of the following former local government districts".

11.00 am

The amendment gives the commissioner the power and room to make significant and meaningful changes to better serve the people of Northern Ireland. In recent debates, we have heard that many Members in the Chamber have reservations about the make-up of the suggested new local government units. By providing the commissioner with the power to be able to make meaningful changes, we can allow those reservations to be heard — and acted on, if the commissioner deems it necessary and in the interests of the local communities of Northern Ireland. That, we contend, is a common-sense amendment that will give the commissioner the flexibility to meaningfully carry out his or her job for the local communities of Northern Ireland, and not exclusively for the two major parties in the Assembly.

In the debate last week, the Minister stated that the words "whole" and "major" are open to interpretation and may be defined differently by the new commissioner. The Minister is right to suggest that the commissioner will, and should, be given the flexibility to do his or her job. That being so, amendment No 6 should have broad support from across the House. The removal of "major", thereby making the role of the commissioner reasonably and flexibly independent, reflects the views expressed by many Members of the House during the debate on the Bill's Second Stage.

Last week, the Member for East Antrim Mr Sammy Wilson said:

"The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner can make small or larger changes to boundaries." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p351, col 1*].

If we retain the Bill in its present form, I am not entirely convinced that Mr Wilson's statement is correct. Indeed, if we retain the original wording of the Bill, we will almost certainly have an outcome that merely confirms amalgamated boundaries suggested in the listing of the 11 council areas. Amendment No 6 provides the commissioner with the flexibility that

many Members of the House have said is desirable and necessary.

In her statement announcing decisions on the future shape of local government, the Minister stated:

"our vision is of a strong, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of all citizens at their core." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p2, col 1*].

There is no problem there, then. The Minister also stated that she recognised:

"that it is important that local government should be closer to citizens and that a balance of responsibility between the Assembly and local government is necessary." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p1, col 2*].

I urge the Minister and the Assembly to get that balance between the Assembly and local government right from the start. What better way to create strong and vibrant local government than by giving local communities, through the commissioner, meaningful power to influence the make-up of their own local government units? If we do not allow for the commissioner to make meaningful changes in light of the consultations that he or she will have with local communities, we will be sending out the message that all our pronounced commitments to creating vibrant and strong local government that is for the people and close to the people of Northern Ireland were merely words. I urge the Assembly to support amendment No 6.

Mr Gallagher: The SDLP continues to support the review of public administration in the interests of delivering a better service to the public and improvements in accountability, value for money and accessibility. The SDLP's key concern in relation to local government is to ensure that the new councils are representative of the community and operate on the basis of legislative power-sharing concerns.

From the outset, our party said no to the proposed super councils, and since 2002, we have stated our concerns consistently that the reduction of council numbers on the scale that was proposed would have Balkanised the North. We welcome the scrapping of the seven-council proposal, which, as we said at the time, was British Government policy. It was wholly inappropriate for Northern Ireland, and it was supported by only Sinn Féin. Indeed, it was an issue that divided Sinn Féin and led to the muzzling of Francie Molloy, who is one of that party's most experienced local government representatives. I notice that Mr Molloy has been in the Chamber today, and, no doubt at this stage, he is having the last laugh on some of his colleagues who sought to suppress his views.

The SDLP amendments in group 1 are aimed at giving flexibility to the commissioner as to the number of boundaries and councils. It is clear from our amendment No 14 in group 2 that such flexibility will ensure that the new councils are based on population

profile, demographic needs and geography, rather than on an arbitrary and rigid decision that has been born of political negotiation.

The SDLP amendments also propose to delete from the Bill the proposed mergers, leaving increased flexibility for the commissioner to consider appropriate linkages under the set criteria. The Minister's proposal fails to allow any flexibility. It is much too early to decide that a council such as Fermanagh District Council, for example, which is the only council the boundary of which coincides with the county boundary, should have no future. Similarly, the Bill proposes to split the two councils that largely make up the constituency of West Tyrone — Omagh District Council and Strabane District Council. Given the close links that exist between those two district councils, it is much too early to decide that they should have no future under the proposed arrangements.

Opportunities should be given to the people who count most — the ratepayers — to put their views to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. At that stage, several options would remain open. Is there anybody who, in setting out to build a house, would show an architect a piece of ground and ask him to build a house with 11 rooms?

Mr Weir: If the honourable Member were to approach an architect or builder and ask them to build several houses, would it be good to advise them to build houses with perhaps 11 or 15 rooms or any number of rooms in between?

Mr Gallagher: That matter would best be referred to the Committee for the Environment.

To return to what I was saying, we all know that the architect will build the 11 rooms, but they may not all be equal — the job cannot be done in the way that has been asked. For example, one room will have no windows, or another will be difficult to access because the corridor needs to be narrow. When embarking on a major task such as this, it therefore makes sense to leave some elbow room. Amendment No 2, which provides for the number of councils to be between 11 and 15, leaves that kind of flexibility.

Mr F McCann: Does the Member not agree that amendment No 2 is aimed not at giving the commissioner flexibility, but reflects the SDLP's inability to set a firm figure for the number of councils and that it also has more to do with protecting the council electoral base of the Member's party than with anything else?

Mr Gallagher: I made the point clearly, and I assure everyone that the SDLP is united in its support for the amendment. I regret —

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Gallagher: I will not give way again.

I am disappointed that dithering by the DUP and Sinn Féin has resulted in the Bill's accelerated passage. That forces the Assembly to address matters in a rushed manner, and the mounting pressure is largely of the Minister's making. The SDLP acknowledges that swift progress is required, but I stress that my party will not support accelerated passage for future legislation on related matters. Ministers must not be allowed to proceed on that basis because it is unhelpful to the democratic process, particularly the scrutiny mechanisms of the Assembly.

It is remarkable that the equality impact assessment —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not relevant to the debate, Mr Gallagher. Please stick to speaking about the amendments, not about accelerated passage or equality impact assessments.

Mr Gallagher: To put the debate in context, the SDLP's amendments are designed to provide an opportunity to improve one aspect of an unsatisfactory process. The Assembly is rushing through important legislation without resolving other fundamental issues such as power sharing or reaching an agreement to hand over significant powers.

I urge Members to support the SDLP's amendments Nos 2 and 5 and their consequential amendments.

Mr Weir: The amendments fall into several categories. The Alliance Party's amendment No 1, and amendment Nos 7, 9 and 17 to which it gives rise, deal with whether there should be 11, 15 or, in theory, seven councils, a matter that was previously discussed in the Chamber. The amendments are wrong because the parties struck the correct balance by proposing an 11-council model.

A similar balance must now be struck between the need for local accountability and identity — and the DUP considered the seven-council model to be inappropriate for Northern Ireland because it fails to satisfy that requirement — and ensuring the appropriate economy of scale, balanced rates and councils of similar size. Councils must be of a sufficient size to be able to cope successfully with their new functions and absorb their new powers. I hope that, as the Minister said, there will be a rolling process rather than a one-off transfer of powers. Councils must be of the correct economy of scale to handle the future transfer of additional powers — and the 11-council model caters for that.

It was remiss of me not to declare an interest at the outset: I am a member of North Down Borough Council and the vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). The Alliance Party's attempt to push for a 15-council model does not reflect the new situation in Northern Ireland: the Assembly is up and running, and a degree of consensus must be achieved.

Dr Farry: The number of powers that were originally to be transferred to local government, in lieu of regional accountability in Northern Ireland, was revised, and significantly reduced, in the light of the fact that there is now an Assembly in place. Does the Member accept, therefore, that there is a reduced need to transfer powers to local government and a stronger argument for retaining more of the existing structures rather than for the more radical reforms being suggested?

Mr Weir: I am not sure whether the Member is joining his erstwhile colleague, Brian Wilson, in arguing for the retention of 26 councils.

11.15 am

I agree with the Member that the situation is new; we have an Assembly that is up and running and we have regional accountability. Consequently, the context has changed considerably, and the rationale that was used to justify the seven-council model — with a range of powers that would, effectively, operate in the absence of regional accountability — no longer applies. Therefore, it is important that all parties try to ensure that the level of functions match the number of councils. What we have put in place will provide that degree of balance. The Alliance Party's 15-council model, which was debated last week, is out of step. The 11-council model creates a balance between having economies of scale and councils that are not too remote.

The Alliance Party amendments, Nos 3 and 4, list particular councils and propose to give maximum flexibility to the commissioner. However, those amendments would throw a number of councils, including those named on the lists, into a high level of uncertainty. For example, if a council is not on the lists, how can it plan for the future? Will Strabane District Council, for instance, be looking to the north and Londonderry, or east to Omagh, or will it be joining up with councils in a different direction? Actually, looking from Strabane, it is southeast to Omagh: one feels that the political compasses that the Members from South Antrim and I would be following might be slightly different.

Under such circumstances, how can councils make plans? There would be a least a year's delay, because a lot of the work would have to be put on ice. How, for example, could there be any examination of transitional committees if, in one case, your council is to be part of 11 councils, or, in the other case, it is to be part of 15 councils? In which direction would your council be going? The same applies, to some extent, to amendment No 6 from the Ulster Unionist Party.

The other Alliance Party amendment, I believe, refers to a reduction in the number of councillors. The proposer of the motion, when speaking to Mr Alex Maskey earlier, referred to councillor numbers. Perhaps the maths had not been done particularly well.

The current proposals cater for 460 councillors, although the commissioner can make adjustments in individual cases. The Alliance Party proposal caters for 410 councillors, which is a reduction of 50. I am sure that the proposer might be keen to go to some of his colleagues and indicate which of them are to be culled — some of my colleagues seem to be suggesting names already. If we are to have proper local representation, and be responsive to local needs, we need to have the correct number of councillors. The Alliance Party's proposal for a more than 10% reduction in the number of councillors provided for by the Bill has not been thought through.

Regardless of my criticisms of the Alliance Party amendments, most of them give us some degree of certainty. The SDLP's position of having anywhere between 11 and 15 councils throws us into a quagmire of chaos, confusion and delay.

Mr Gallagher: Does the Member agree that when reviews of constituency boundaries are carried out at Westminster, in Northern Ireland's case, a Bill is usually worded so that there is a band — for example, that there will be between 17 and 19 constituencies? It does not say that there shall be 18 constituencies.

Mr Weir: I appreciate the Member's point. However, that does not compare like with like. The Assembly must deal with the current 26 councils and modernise local government.

Let us remember that constituencies' boundaries can change. One of the weaknesses of the Ulster Unionist's position is its reliance on that. To change a constituency's boundaries may affect its electorate and Member of Parliament. However, it does not affect the institutions, services or people's jobs. If one were to say to a council's employees that because there could be any number of councils, its boundaries could be anywhere and it could be grouped with other areas, quite frankly, one of their complaints would be — indeed, the concern has, rightly, been raised by many local government employees — that they have not been given a high level of certainty. Provision must be made for that.

The roulette wheel of choice, which could land anywhere between 11 and 15 councils as a number pops into the head of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, abrogates the House's responsibilities. The DUP has proposed that there should be 11 councils; other parties have proposed different numbers. However, the position of four parties is to provide some certainty about the number of councils that are put in place. At least, that will bring about a situation in which the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner is not simply given carte blanche to produce any number of councils off the top of his or her head.

A situation in which there could be any number of councils between 11 and 15 would fall down because no consultation has been carried out at any stage on any number of councils other than seven, 11 and 15. It would also be a clear abrogation of the House's responsibilities. Clearly, some of the SDLP's other amendments are essentially consequential; amendment No 5, amendment No 10 and amendment No 18 flow from amendment No 2. The reasons for rejecting them all are the same.

I appreciate the argument that has been made by the proposers of the Ulster Unionists' amendment No 6. That party has not put down a separate proposal for the number of councils, despite the fact that, at times, it seemed to be a point of high principle that the number should not simply be 15, but that it should be 15 on the basis of parliamentary constituencies. I accept that the Ulster Unionist Party has not put down an amendment to that effect because it will potentially support other parties' amendments on the matter.

With regard to the issue of 15 parliamentary constituencies, as was illustrated by the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Mr Gallagher, I should reiterate that the number of parliamentary constituencies, by nature, can be completely free flowing. During the past 30 years, the number has gone from 12, to 17, to 18. There cannot be certainty about the number of councils. Although adjustments can be made to councils' boundaries, there cannot be a situation in which the number of councils changes constantly, perhaps every 10 years. No one believes that the current process will be pain-free for councils. However, the high disruption that would be caused by constant change to the number of councils does not bear thinking about.

Although the Ulster Unionists' amendment No 6 is intended to create the highest level of flexibility, to leave out the words "the major" means that councils would constantly be cast into a situation in which they did not know what direction they would go.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way in a moment.

For example, will the majority of Strabane District Council's area go to Omagh or Londonderry? That has important implications for planning because delays would be caused while local arrangements are being made. That would create uncertainty for staff, as, in a sense, it is not an institution that is being transferred.

Indeed, if there were a situation in which it was not known whether 45%, 55% or 60% of a council would be transferred in one direction or the other, how, for example, would debts and financial arrangements between councils be handled when the merger takes place? The high level of flexibility that is currently provided by the Bill creates a situation where although a large proportion of an area is moved from the council

to which it had been designated in order to accommodate local need, the institution is left intact. That does, at least, create a proper level of engagement for staff and, from an institutional point of view, a pathway to go forward.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he accept that coterminosity in terms of public representation would be useful for ratepayers, like taxpayers, to be able to clearly identify their Member of Parliament, their Members of the Assembly, the boundaries of their local government area and their local councillors?

There is another point in favour of having a higher number of councils. In my constituency there is the prospect of the people of Crossmaglen and Crossgar being served by the same local government. In reality, the two areas bear little correlation — how can we call that successful local government?

Mr Weir: Of the two points that the Member raised, I will first deal with the idea of coterminosity of elected representatives. Delivery of services is more important to people. At the moment, in most cases, we do not have coterminosity between parliamentary constituencies and council areas. I have not noticed a great deal of confusion about that; if someone has a problem, he can approach his Assembly Member or local councillor to help address that. That issue is, therefore, slightly overplayed.

If we were proposing something that was out of step with every boundary in Northern Ireland, and the Members sitting opposite were proposing that everything be put in line with coterminosity, then there would be more merit in looking at it. However, the parliamentary constituencies which the Member is so in favour of are not coterminous with health authorities, education boards or police districts. Indeed, there is no coterminosity with parliamentary boundaries on any subject.

In relation to the issue about Crossmaglen and Crossgar, clearly there will be a range of places that do not harmonise together, which is an issue that will come in at a later stage. It is possible to pinpoint areas that sit 500 yards apart but which have little in common.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I want to finish my point first. I will be happy to give way after that.

Under the proposed new boundaries, which will be a matter for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Crossgar would be at the northern end of the Newry, Mourne and Down district council area. That is a clear case in which there could be a strong argument that the people of Crossgar may or may not see themselves as more linked with Ards. That is a poor example. My colleague beside me Simon Hamilton, who is from the Strangford area, is unsure

as to how keen the people of Ards would be about embracing the people of Crossgar — that is another question.

The point is that the diverse areas at the ends of any model of local government are exactly those that must be looked at to ensure that boundaries reflect local need. There is plenty of scope within the Bill to do that already.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for giving way. This is on the point that Mr Kennedy made — in our usual efforts to help the Ulster Unionist Party. Surely the issue about combining Down District Council with Newry and Mourne District Council is broader than simply whether towns and villages at either tail end are appropriately grouped. A map of that area shows that the Mourne Mountains are in the middle of the presumed grouping. Bearing in mind that these new councils are supposed to be more efficient in service delivery, does the Member think that it is sensible to have an elongated council area with a major mountain range in the middle?

Mr Weir: I am not quite sure what the Member thinks that we should do with the Mourne Mountains. I am aware that the party prides itself on its environmental credentials. However, I am not altogether sure that many people in the Mourne area would be keen on flattening the mountains so that we could create a more homogeneous unit. The reality is that there are going to be different geographical features.

People have found themselves on different sides of the Mourne Mountains in the past, and I point out to the Member that roads have been invented and that people can drive over mountains. He must live in the real world.

11.30 pm

Sadly, the adoption of amendment No 6 would create a high level of confusion. The Bill provides scope to be able to cope with those sorts of local issues. For example, people in Castlederg might see themselves as being closely linked to Omagh, and people in Strabane might feel attached to Londonderry. Consideration must be given to where the Clogher Valley and Fivemiletown belong, and where Crossgar, Killyleagh and Saintfield see themselves. One could highlight a range of areas to be debated, including the Cregagh Road, Twinbrook and Poleglass, and Rathcoole. Ultimately, an independent person will listen to the public and make judgements on those issues, and there is scope for that.

The amendments do not add to the Bill; they simply reinforce the desire of certain parties for a particular outcome. We have the right balance for making improvements to the working of the Bill, and the amendments that are listed in group 1 should be rejected.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I sometimes wonder whether the debate is about the indulgences of councillors and bums on seats, rather than achieving effective government. Perhaps today's debate on the aggregates mapping programme will deal with the point that Mr Farry raised about the Mountains of Mourne, now that the Minister of the Environment is here.

I have studied the Marshalled List of Amendments from Members who like to consider themselves to be the official opposition, and I do not believe that it would be in the interests of the general public to support them. A few debates have taken place on the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill, and I reiterate what I said during those debates. Although there are concerns in the nationalist end of my own area about the council area to which it will move, a model of 11 council areas has been agreed, which should create a balance in local government and deliver effective government. Perhaps parties that want 15 councils — or some other number on which they cannot agree — would do well to accept that.

Rather than debating amendments to the Bill, we should be moving on to ensure that the next level can be implemented so that the future of local government can be radically changed for the benefit of its people. The amendments are an attempt to do the work of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in advance of his or her appointment. Not only do the amendments try to change the terms of reference but they narrow the council areas to such an extent that it would not be possible to work outside the parameters that would be drawn. That is not acceptable, so neither my party nor I can accept the amendments.

I call on Members to move the Bill forward and to let us get on with the work that the public wish to be carried out. That work is about creating local, proper, fair and effective local government. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council. My fellow Member for East Antrim Alastair Ross said that the choice was between seven and 11 council areas. However, he did not say why a choice had to be made between those numbers. I fail to understand why the option of having 15 council areas has been excluded from that consideration.

Mr Ross: If the Member does not realise why the choice was between seven and 11 council areas, perhaps he is not as politically astute as he would let on.

Mr Beggs: I understand that the Assembly has the ability to determine the make-up of local government and its boundaries.

If we are willing, we can determine any number of boundaries that we wish. Some Members might not be

willing to consider alternative numbers, and wish to work within the straitjacket of seven councils that was proposed by the Northern Ireland Office, but there is no reason why the Assembly should not be free to decide to adopt a different model, and I am disappointed by the Member's response.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Before giving way, I wish to develop my speech. I will give way later, but I want to make some other points first.

Although some people consider coterminosity irrelevant, it is important. Some Members argue against linking any boundaries — why not break all natural boundaries? Normally, there are good reasons for fixing boundaries. In my constituency of East Antrim, the Antrim plateau consists of hills that create a natural physical boundary. In addition, there is a large upland area that is sparsely occupied and, consequently, services are patchy and there are significant distances between centres of population, such as Larne, Carrickfergus and, potentially, Ballymena. Therefore, coterminosity is important.

Everyone accepts the Westminster boundary for East Antrim, and the reasons for determining that boundary are clear — the Antrim hills form a natural physical barrier. Nevertheless, some Members wish to ignore the reality. Owing to hills, such as the Antrim plateau, community interaction corresponds to valleys and historical links to market towns.

The 15-council model consists of one council area, comprising the four Belfast constituencies, in addition to 14 council areas outside Belfast. People who live, work, shop and socialise in Belfast, bearing in mind their postcodes, consider themselves to be in Belfast, and there is great merit in uniting them in one area in which council services and additional services that are proposed to be devolved to local government would be provided. The proposal to link — as some Members have suggested — sizable portions of Belfast to areas that are some distance away, such as Lisburn, does not appear to be logical. Therefore, I fully support amendment No 6, whereby it is proposed to remove the words “the major”. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner must be given some degree of flexibility, and there are advantages in that, rather than operating in the proposed straitjacket.

The fact that the proposed Bill has been granted accelerated passage is disappointing. Nevertheless, the Assembly made that determination. However, although many worthwhile and reasoned amendments have been tabled, the DUP and Sinn Féin appear not to be open or willing to consider any of them. A back-door deal seems to have been done between those parties, and, afraid of the deal unravelling, they seem unwilling to consider any alternatives, whether or not they have

merit. Worthwhile amendments have been tabled and, hopefully, at least some members of those parties are open to considering sensible proposals.

As I said, the 15-council model would utilise the accepted and agreed existing boundaries, and, indeed, everyone in the Chamber was elected on the basis of those boundaries. We all accept that, as time goes by, boundaries change slightly and are moved. However, let us attempt to ensure that the vast majority of services are delivered consistently.

My East Antrim colleague Alastair Ross appears to be content with the proposed link between Larne and Carrickfergus, and Ballymena. The co-ordination of those local services will involve the consideration of considerable distances. I fail to understand why the shorter distance between Antrim and Ballymena, which is about 12 miles — as opposed to the 20 miles between Larne and Ballymena, or the longer distance between Carrickfergus and Ballymena — has not been observed.

I mentioned natural geographical boundaries, which have also dictated the major roads and transport links in constituencies. The major roads in the East Antrim coastal area do not run from Carrickfergus or Larne to Ballymena, but follow the coastal strip, such as the A8 or the A2. There is also a railway track and other natural good lines of communication along the coastal strip. Where those natural geographical transport links are not followed, it will be more difficult to deliver effective services.

The practical outworkings of the proposals of the Bill reinforce my view that 15 councils represent a much better model. I ask Members to envisage monthly local-council planning meetings during which a member of the public wants to lobby his or her local councillors to reject an application for apartments or windows that overlook his or her house. That planning meeting will either take place in one area — meaning that councillors will have to travel an unnecessarily long distance — or planning meetings will be rotated among Larne, Carrickfergus and Ballymena. Either way, constituents will have to travel a considerable distance to make their points. The argument for 15 councils is focused on the creation of accountable and accessible local government.

The effect that the proposed 11-council model will have on East Antrim is particularly unfortunate — it will not work well and will not provide a good service for the ratepayers and constituents of Larne, Carrickfergus and parts of Newtownabbey. Therefore, I urge Members to not be drawn into the back-door deal that the DUP and Sinn Féin have made.

Mr Neeson: Does the Member agree that there is already close co-operation between Larne Borough Council, Carrickfergus Borough Council and

Newtownabbey Borough Council? The relationship among those councils should form the basis of the boundaries for the new council.

Mr Beggs: Most local people will agree that there is much co-operation among those councils on various issues, such as the attempts to improve the rail service in East Antrim. Most people in East Antrim shop in their neighbouring towns and boroughs, if not in their own borough. Naturally, people travel along the transport links in East Antrim to shop, and they have connections to the surrounding areas.

I urge Members to think carefully about the constructive proposals in many of the amendments so that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner can have sufficient flexibility to apply a degree of common sense to the outworkings of the proposals, and not be restricted by the straitjacket that the DUP and Sinn Féin have imposed in a Stalinist fashion.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I note that my party has received criticism from Members to my right — they are right in many senses —

Mr Gallagher: And wrong in others.

Mr McGlone: Yes. We have received criticism for being consistent in our views. Our consistency has been shared at grassroots level by some members of Sinn Féin — I will talk more about that later. The criticism has come from a party that changed its view at the drop of a DUP hat — it was the only party in Northern Ireland to rubber-stamp the view of the British Government on this matter. Those observations must be put on the record, acutely made, and shared with other Members.

Essentially, the SDLP wishes to provide local government, equality, accountability, engagement and a sense of belonging for our local communities, as well as responsiveness — through local government — to those communities.

11.45 pm

The SDLP amendments are designed to ensure that the new councils are based on population profile, democratic needs and geography rather than on an arbitrary and rigid decision born of political negotiation. That approach is not novel; it mirrors the logic of the Bill because it applies a similar logic to the creation of ward boundaries as it does to that of council boundaries. If flexibility is appropriate at ward level, why should it not be granted at council level? If ward boundaries take account of communities, and rural and urban representation, why is that logic not applied at council level rather than being denied?

Some of the other proposed amendments aim to achieve a similar end by alternative means. In particular, amendment No 6, in the name of Mr Kennedy and his

party, makes infinite common sense. It makes particular sense to those living in communities that will be arbitrarily divided by a line on a map. That division could equally be aligned at council or ward level, so flexibility must be built in to allow the realistic needs of local communities to be accommodated. The UUP amendment is pragmatic, and I believe that anyone with common sense will see it as such. For that reason, the SDLP fully supports that amendment.

Mr Weir commented earlier that the SDLP amendments would create uncertainty. However, the uncertainty that has been in place for several years is the result of a lack of decision-making.

My party's proposal will allow flexibility to move from the general to the particular when the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has all the relevant details. It will also allow the commissioner to respond to local needs realistically and pragmatically. The 11- to 15-council model allows the commissioner to do that, based on how the consultation process goes. Previously, when the seven-council model was imposed on us, there was no consultation. In my own area, that proposal saw a local government boundary straddle three counties from south Derry across to Belleek in County Fermanagh.

All the SDLP asks is that pragmatism and realism are allowed to prevail in the commissioner's deliberations. The party wants elbow room to be built in to take account of real local needs in the wider community.

Mr B McCrea: When I arrived in the Chamber, I was given a briefing by my party colleagues. It was suggested that the UUP should adopt a reasoned approach on the issue and that it should attempt to persuade rather than cause a fracas. I am a man who is easily guided in these matters, so that will be my position. It is helpful to have party colleagues because they have reminded me to declare an interest as a councillor on Lisburn City Council.

Therefore, rather than grandstanding, I ask Members of the DUP and Sinn Féin to consider the real and genuine concerns of the UUP. I also ask the parties to consider that the adoption of the UUP amendment — which simply removes the words “the major” — would afford the necessary flexibility to come up with a satisfactory solution for all.

Earlier, I heard a Member argue — I believe it was a Sinn Féin Member — that, by tabling this amendment, the UUP is trying to do the commissioner's work in advance.

That is not the case. The party's aim is to give the commissioner sufficient flexibility to allow him or her to come up with a set of boundaries that fully reflect the natural boundaries with which people identify. When we last discussed the issue with the Minister,

she assured me that we could raise that matter with the commissioner.

I listened to Peter Weir's long alliterative list of town names, which included Crossgar, Crossmaglen, and so on. We must see whether we can resolve the matters that have arisen in a much more benign manner. I have mentioned Castlereagh before, but I can see no real reason why it should be included as part of the city of Lisburn. Were I not in a benign mood, I might be tempted to say that the emperor has no clothes.

Mr Elliott: I do not want to steal the Member's thunder, and I have no personal interest in this matter, but perhaps the city of Lisburn will be included in the borough of Castlereagh.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr B McCrea: That, of course, is a danger that we all face — an alternative option would be that the city of Belfast might be included in the borough of Castlereagh. It is almost a case of the borough with no mates.

My point is that there are natural contours. My friend Roy Beggs explained the situation from his point of view. We in Lagan Valley understand that the River Lagan runs through the area and that there is a natural hinterland, so it would make sense for us to have locally devolved powers for that area. I daresay that there are folks from Poleglass and Colin Glen who consider themselves to be part of West Belfast. Certainly, when I go there to have a chat with them, they tell me that it is very nice to see me, but that they do not really travel to Lisburn, rather they travel to Belfast. Therefore, that is another issue.

Our amendment seeks to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to allow the commissioner to take those points on board. It flies in the face of common sense to say that Castlereagh is part of Lisburn — it is part of Belfast.

Mr A Maskey: The Member is talking about the need to ensure greater flexibility, but will he advise us how taking away an option — by removing the words “the major” from the clause — would offer greater flexibility? Logic dictates that by doing so, it would narrow the commissioner's scope.

Mr B McCrea: Of course, that is another issue that we would have had a chance to discuss had the Bill not been given accelerated passage. Amendment No 6 seeks to remove the words “the major” from clause 1(2) so that it will read “or the part”. It would be appropriate to place areas of Castlereagh in the Lagan Valley council area.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: There seems to be a bit of queue.

Mr Spratt: When the Member last spoke on this matter, he did not know which areas were part of

Castlereagh Borough Council and which were part of Belfast City Council — he said that the Rosetta area was in the Castlereagh Borough Council area. Will he accept that many areas in the Castlereagh Borough Council area lie very close to Lisburn — Carryduff, Moneyreagh and other areas.

Does he further accept that the people of Castlereagh do not consider themselves to be part of Belfast, in the same way as people from Lisburn probably do not consider themselves to be part of the city of Belfast? Part of Lisburn lies close to Belfast, too. Perhaps the Member has not recognised that fact, or perhaps he does not want to recognise it.

Mr B McCrea: Once again, it appears that a sophisticated argument is lost on Mr Spratt. My point regarding the Rosetta area was that decisions about which places belonged in which council areas were being made arbitrarily, particularly when it came to parts of Castlereagh.

I thank the Member for making my argument for me. There are parts of Castlereagh that have a natural affinity with, and should be included in, Lagan Valley. However, there are other parts of Castlereagh from which one could throw a stone into Belfast. Perhaps I should not say that, because we do not throw stones any more. The point is that we would have to ask people whether they regard themselves to be citizens of Belfast. Members are in danger of standing in their little ivory towers in the Assembly and inserting pins in maps.

Ask people on the ground in which part of the city they live. I do not know whether Mr Spratt has recently spoken to anyone in Castlereagh, but I would be pretty sure that a referendum that asks people whether they live in Belfast or in Lisburn would discover that a fair majority consider that they live in Belfast.

I am not trying to predetermine an outcome. I am not saying that I know better or that I have got a particular plan. All that I am saying is that we would like to give the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner the powers and the ability to take those points on board and to examine the issues. There is a substantial case to be investigated.

Our approach to the first block of amendments has been supported by Mr McGlone and other Members, including, as usual, the Alliance Party. It is tremendous to have that support. Members know that they are in big trouble whenever Dr Farry stands up to support them.

When the Bill was granted accelerated passage, there was at least a suggestion that people would bend over backwards to try to accommodate reasoned and reasonable amendments. We were told that there was not enough time for a Committee Stage, so we are tabling genuine amendments, which we urge Members

to take on board. That would make the Bill more acceptable to the electorate.

The question is whether, in a reasonable and responsible manner, the Assembly can agree amendments that benefit everyone in Northern Ireland. I hope that Members accept my argument in the spirit in which it has been made, and support our amendments. We will consider the other group of amendments separately.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council.

Essentially, two broad issues are being debated. The first is how many councils Northern Ireland should have — 11, 15, or perhaps somewhere in between. The amendment represents the last opportunity to avoid taking a retrograde step by allowing the Bill to set in stone the figure of 11 councils.

The second issue is the approach to delivering new councils and taking forward the process of redrawing boundaries, irrespective of whether there are 11 or 15 councils. Some consequential amendments arise from both issues.

There is a trade-off between the number and size of councils, and the powers that they are granted. The wider community, and some Members, share the Alliance Party's view that the proposed level of powers to be granted to the new councils simply does not warrant moving to 11 councils instead of the current 26. The establishment of 15 councils is much more appropriate.

Of course, we are all in favour of efficiency and economies of scale in local government. That is important across the whole ambit of governance in Northern Ireland. However, some of the approaches that we are taking towards boundaries will inhibit efficiencies and economies of scale.

12.00 noon

The other aspect of local governance relates to a sense of local identity, civic focus and access for constituents to the people who are making decisions on issues that affect their daily lives, such as planning, local roads or the emptying of bins. That is very important. Local representation is an important issue in our society, and we are trying to encourage that across the board, on a range of issues, including policing, for example. It would be a mistake to move away from that.

It has been argued that the 15-council model would make for a more difficult process than the proposed 11-council model. One could not group the existing 26 councils together as readily, as we would end up with parts of some existing council areas being thrown in with others. That would result in problems involving the division of assets and liabilities and other issues regarding resources, among other things.

In any event, that process will come with a move towards the 11-council model. As has been said, it appears that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be able to tinker with the boundaries of the proposed new 11 council areas. That will inevitably lead to bits of council areas being transferred, with the result that we will have to address the issue of resourcing and how that is split up between different councils. Therefore, that argument is a bit of a red herring, to put it bluntly.

My other concern relates to the issue of identity and focus for councils. In the seven-council model, seven meaningless names were proposed — Belfast, East, Inner East, South, North West, North East and West. I do not see how, under that model, people would have felt any real sense of identity with the areas from which their local services were being provided. I am not sure that the process will be much better under an 11-council system. The process of creating names for councils is inherently difficult and flawed, and I am sceptical about whether it will be successful.

I wish to focus primarily on the second aspect of the first group of amendments, which is the approach to drawing the boundaries. I accept that there may be a political deal on having 11 councils rather than 15, and, if the DUP and Sinn Féin have made that deal and are sticking to it, fair play to them. Indeed, it may well be a harbinger of things to come. I do not agree with what those parties have done, but it is their democratic right to ram their deal through the House if they so choose. However, there are some amendments that would improve the process of devising boundaries for the new councils, irrespective of whether there are 11 or 15. It is important that those amendments be properly considered. I am disappointed that there seems to be no flexibility regarding the response to our proposed agenda, which is very constructive in trying to improve the Bill. Nevertheless, we accept that the Bill will go through the House.

The proposed process is essentially one of grouping existing councils together in twos, threes or fours. As other Members have said, that is an inflexible way of moving forward. The point has been made that there is a certain logic regarding the administrative process, as the transition from one set of councils to another will give officers and councillors a sense of direction regarding the preparations that they will have to make. However, there may be some changes to boundaries anyway, so that idea does not entirely hold water.

In the longer term, this is not about making things easier for administrators or councillors over the next two or three years — this is about putting in place boundaries that will be with us for 30 or 40 years. It is about creating service units, focuses of local identity that respond to the needs of the people of Northern Ireland — the people who actually put us here. It is for

their consideration that we must have a proper analysis of what is happening, rather than simply doing something quickly to not inconvenience people in the short term. Frankly, if we had dealt with the issue earlier, there would be less haste from Members on some Benches who are trying to rush the Bill through at the eleventh hour.

The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has a mandate to modify the district boundaries, provided that is done within certain parameters — that is, retaining the major part, which we interpret as the major geographic part. However, that has not been tested by law and may not be interpreted as such by a new Boundaries Commissioner.

The Alliance Party fears that the flexibility that exists on paper will not materialise in practice. The provisional recommendations made during the process in 2006 and 2007 resulted in little change. Except for an acknowledgement of some minor defacements, no changes were made to the council districts transferred to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner by the direct rule Administration. There were no proposed changes to the East, Inner East, North East, North West, South or West district areas with one small exception — the Magilligan Strand in the North West district. Belfast's boundaries were changed but, again, that process was flawed and, ultimately, unsatisfactory.

The revised recommendations submitted by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner made only two further changes to district boundaries: Mussenden Temple was moved from the North West district to the North East, and Glencreagh Road — a street that will now have its 20 seconds of fame — switched from the proposed East district into the Belfast district. I do not take much confidence from the previous process that was executed by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, which, essentially, was based on the same procedures that the Minister of the Environment wants the House to support.

Belfast will pose a particular problem for the future commissioner. The boundaries of Belfast are tightly drawn; they do not reflect the people of Northern Ireland's sense of the natural setting of Belfast. In my experience, most people who live in what is formally known as the Castlereagh Borough Council area consider themselves part of Belfast, and, therefore, frankly, I am at a loss to understand Mr Spratt's earlier remarks.

The south-eastern boundary of Belfast, which is carried forward through this legislation, dates back to 1898. Given the changes to Belfast over the past 110 years, we are starting on a flawed basis. The Belfast district area needs to expand and become a natural unit. Members have talked about recognising Belfast as our capital city and recognising the important role that it plays in driving the wider regional economy. We

have discussed giving the councils community-planning powers to capture that as far as possible. Belfast's productivity levels are well above the Northern Ireland average, and it is doing very well when compared with standards in the rest of the UK. We need to focus on making Belfast an effective unit of local government.

In 2006, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner changed the west and south-east boundaries of Belfast. However, a number of anomalies remained. For example, three wards, namely Four Winds, Beechill and Newtownbreda, were effectively left hanging outside the boundaries of Belfast and were to be served by the proposed East district. In essence, those wards were left to hang in the wind without consideration of logical service delivery, and many people found that disconcerting and illogical.

There is logic in the south-east boundary of Belfast being defined as the ring road or, more logically, the build line around Belfast that continues to the Castlereagh hills. Identity and service delivery are important considerations too. The notion that sections of south Belfast would be serviced by a council area based on a Castlereagh and Lisburn configuration is barking mad.

Logic dictates that Belfast is better placed to provide services to people who live in those communities. We must ensure that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has sufficient flexibility to ensure that such issues will be addressed.

There are several other anomalies in the current arrangement of boundaries. As for the proposed hook-up between Down District Council and Newry and Mourne District Council, I have already pointed out that the issue is not simply that towns and villages at either end of the proposed new council will not fit in. The problem is that the new council area will have an elongated shape, divided by the Mourne. Although we can get around mountains, they inhibit, to a certain extent, the efficient delivery of services. That argument applies elsewhere, and Mr Beggs used it in relation to the Antrim plateau.

That brings me to the proposed combination of Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus councils. Many people on the ground believe that a hook-up between the Ballymena and Antrim councils would be, by far, a more efficient and logical solution. Even the railway line that runs from Newtownabbey, through Carrickfergus, to Larne creates a sense of identity and ties people together in those communities. We are trying to encourage more people to use public transport. That combination would be straightforward, and I am at a loss to understand how the proposed boundaries were arrived at.

In the west, there is a proposed merger of Fermanagh and Omagh councils. Although that topic is close to Minister Foster's heart, it is causing concern on the ground, because it is no secret that there is little love lost between Omagh and Fermanagh. We may talk about communities trying to make new arrangements in the short term, but there will be major problems in implementing the process in that region. Although there is a certain logic in linking Fermanagh with Omagh, one could make a similarly strong argument that Fermanagh could be linked as readily with the Clogher Valley, perhaps even as far as Dungannon. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner should have the flexibility to determine which of those solutions is the more accommodating.

Mr Neeson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Dr Farry: I will give way first to Mr Neeson, then to Mr Weir.

Mr Neeson: Does the Member agree that the Fermanagh case is a classic example of why not all the councils in Northern Ireland must be the same size or have the same size of population?

Dr Farry: Yes, I agree with my colleague Mr Neeson. As far as I am concerned, if there were to be 15 councils, Fermanagh District Council could remain in place. Councils across the globe vary in area and population size. At times, one must draw a boundary around a coherent local community with a small population in order to preserve the community's sense of coherence and identity. Fermanagh is a classic case in that regard.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentioned Clogher Valley, and whether it should be part of the Fermanagh/Omagh amalgamation. Clogher Valley is currently one district electoral area, which is equivalent to about one quarter of Dungannon. Will the Member accept that the current proposals could place part — or all — of the Clogher Valley into Fermanagh or Omagh? That would be permissible under the proposed regulations, not precluded by them.

Although I do not wish to anger the Minister by being in any way derogatory about Fermanagh, surely one of the drawbacks of establishing a separate Fermanagh council — and affording it some degree of special status — would be that people in Fermanagh would be much more heavily represented than people in North Down or Ards. Surely we should strive for a greater level of equality of representation to ensure that there would be a roughly similar number of people for each councillor? For example, people in North Down and Ards do not live in a rural area, and they should not be treated, therefore, as second-class citizens.

12.15 pm

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his intervention.

I made the point that the Fermanagh/Omagh corridor could be extended to include Dungannon. That would be as logical as linking the respective district councils of Fermanagh and Omagh. It would also, by and large, reflect Westminster's system of boundaries. However, as I said last week, it would not be wise to follow the Westminster boundaries, given that they can change under the periodic boundary commissions. We should consider only minor defacements of the new council boundaries within the next 30 or 40 years.

I disagree with the Member's second point. I speak from the perspective of North Down, an area which is largely urban and suburban, rather than rural. It is fundamentally important that Members represent areas of similar geographical and electoral size in the Assembly. However, each local council can be considered separately; some councils will have large populations and some will have small populations. A process that attempts to ensure that each councillor has an equal number of electors is flawed; the UK, and other countries, demonstrate that.

Mr Weir: I appreciate the Member's point. However, in the UK, a number of decisions are made on the basis of shared services, or by drawing representation from the councils. It has been indicated that the libraries authority will have 11 councillors, one drawn from each council. Now, there will inevitably be some variation in the size of council electorates. However, Fermanagh has a smaller population than Bangor, for example. A single council for North Down and Ards — or however it is drawn — could have three, four or five times the population of Fermanagh, but would have the same level of representation on Northern Ireland-wide bodies. Surely, such a system ultimately discriminates against people in certain areas.

Dr Farry: That is inherent in any local government system, and cannot be avoided. There are major discrepancies in the populations of the 11 proposed council areas. Belfast will inevitably have more councillors — potentially 60, as opposed to 40 elsewhere. It is a mistake to compare regional bodies with a body such as the Assembly, which is established on firm and clear democratic principles. They are different bodies performing different tasks.

It is inherent in local government systems — in the UK and in other countries — that councillors from different authorities, representing varying electoral populations, will come together. We cannot have uniformity in our approach — local councils are not administrative units merely designed to dole out services. Local councils provide an important focal point for local identity, local representation and civic

pride; they must not lose those functions. There is a strong case for preserving the coherent unit of administration in County Fermanagh. I have family with deep roots in Fermanagh, so I am not talking through my hat completely.

There are two broad issues here. The first is whether there should be 11 or 15 councils. The Alliance Party believes that the 15-council model is by far the wiser and more balanced option.

The second issue is the approach that will be taken to determine the boundaries. From the Alliance Party's perspective, it makes much more sense to identify a list of councils around which new boundaries may be devised, rather than try to pair off council areas. The danger in taking the latter approach is that one can easily end up with a doughnut effect — where the centre of the proposed council area lacks population and where the population is concentrated on the fringes, creating difficulties both in the formation of identity and in service delivery. Alternatively, one can end up with a council area that is dumbbell shaped, where the major population centres are located at opposite ends of the council area and are separated by a sparsely populated area: that, too, creates problems for service delivery.

If one considers the current model, one can see that across Northern Ireland each local government district has a major town as its focus, and comprises that town's hinterland. That makes great sense as regards service delivery. I appreciate that the present model is for councils with different powers than those proposed for the new councils, but I fear that what is before us is going too far in the wrong direction.

Mr Elliott: I am pleased to be following Mr Farry. I also feel privileged that two Members from North Down are taking such a keen interest in County Fermanagh. Long may they keep up that interest: not just in relation to boundaries, but in the other aspects of life that we debate. I look forward to their support on other issues.

I declare my interest as a member of Fermanagh District Council. If either of the North Down Members wishes to contest a seat on the new council, they are welcome to do so.

We have heard much debate on the proposed 11-council model and how it will affect individual areas. We have heard much about Counties Antrim and Down and about some aspects of the greater Belfast area. I am surprised that the greater Belfast area has not been debated more fully: it is the key to the entire proposals.

However, the west of the Province takes precedence; and I am surprised that it took contributions from two North Down Members to pose a significant debate on it. I want to consider the relationships between the existing council areas of Fermanagh, Omagh, Strabane and Dungannon. The majority of members of Omagh

District Council want their district to be joined with the Strabane District Council area: the majority of Strabane councillors want to join with Omagh District Council. Neither will get what they want.

Fermanagh councillors would prefer amalgamation with the Dungannon council area — as Mr Farry has indicated — as opposed to joining with Omagh District Council. In answer to an oral question a few weeks ago, the Minister suggested that the proposed new council might be called the “greater Fermanagh” council. I assume that she has the support of her West Tyrone colleagues for that suggestion, though we have not heard from them.

I wonder how the people in Strabane council area will react to being swallowed up by Londonderry: that is effectively what will happen. I also wonder how the people in Omagh council area will react to being swallowed up by Fermanagh. Last week, we debated the proposals for St Lucia and Lisanelly army barracks. Omagh District Council is proposing to have a sub-office of the new council in that location. I would be happy with that, so long as the main council office remains in Fermanagh.

I notice that Mr Molloy is sitting on the Benches opposite, looking quite satisfied that his party has undergone a Damascene conversion from a seven-council model to an 11-council model. I do not know whether there is truth in the rumour that he now wants the rest of the Sinn Féin Members to be suspended, since they have changed stance. However, a Damascene conversion has been undergone by both main parties; the DUP and Sinn Féin.

Those parties now appear to be coming up with an allegiance — or perhaps it is just an agreement on the matter.

Mr Ross: We have heard a lot about the DUP's change of position. Will the Member tell us what page of the DUP 2007 manifesto contains any commitment to 15 councils?

Mr Elliott: Of course, the DUP says much more than it publishes in its manifesto, and it does not stick to that anyway. I do not want to dwell on that point, because it may highlight how that party has changed its position again.

The issue in the west of the Province concerns the dominance of one council over another and about areas that do not have a general allegiance to one another. Strabane District Council and Omagh District Council, for example, were probably quite happy to work together and would have had an easier working relationship than Omagh District Council and Fermanagh District Council. Indeed, the councils of Fermanagh and Dungannon may have a better working relationship than some of the other suggestions.

My other query concerns debt management in those local council areas. That is not covered by this provision, but it will have to be examined in the future.

Coterminosity is also a big issue, and I heard —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I heard the Member's earlier comments, but I would be happy to listen to them again.

Mr Weir: The Member has highlighted a serious issue — the potential debts and asset bases of different councils. Does he accept that working those out will be a lot more difficult if there is complete fluidity in that it may not be known whether a major part of an existing council area is to be included in any new council area? If a major area is to be included, as opposed to small adjustments being made, will that situation not make those calculations more difficult?

Mr Elliott: I do not believe that the inclusion of the major or minor part of a council area would make any difference; indeed, I do not see how such a difference would be made.

Mr Weir spoke earlier about other bodies in the Province, such as the health and education bodies, that do not have a coterminosity project. We have to start somewhere, and one easy area would be with the elected bodies in the Province. If the council, Westminster and Assembly constituency areas covered the same general area, matters would be simplified.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member agree with an earlier point that the policing districts did not follow the new proposed boundaries? That point made the argument about why coterminosity is not necessary. Under the policing legislation, a policing district will naturally be created for each of the new council areas. In my own constituency, the policing district will stretch from Ballymena through Carrickfergus to Larne. That is a large, sparsely populated rural area with a natural geographic boundary within which common difficulties can be dealt with. Will he therefore agree that some of the earlier arguments were shallow?

Mr Elliott: I agree. That point brings me back to the west of the Province and policing — I think that the police have gone ahead with the new F district on the basis of the seven-council model, having already started the process of amalgamating the Cookstown, Omagh, Dungannon and Fermanagh areas in policing structures and running them as one. That will need to be thought out again. There is talk that there may be only one commander for what will be two new council areas that will cover not only those —

Lord Morrow: Does the Member accept that an error was made by the police in moving ahead before the RPA had been determined? We now have the amalgamation of the four districts that he talks about — Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh and Omagh,

which is the nerve centre of the area — under the one command, so does he accept that that decision was wrong, or that it appears to be wrong now? We did not need to wait until now to discover that it was wrong because some of us said at the time — and perhaps he was among us — that that was a premature decision that should have been postponed until the outcome of the RPA could be realised.

12.30 pm

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for his comments, and I agree with him. Many of us, especially in the west of the Province, urged the police not to go down that road at that time. The F district in the west of the Province was more advanced than any of the other police units across the Province that were merged.

It is imperative that we achieve some degree of coterminosity in such areas. If the health and social care trusts, the education and library boards, the Planning Service and the district policing partnerships are working in different areas, we will not make progress, because co-operation is required.

I support the Ulster Unionist Party's amendments. I do not support amendment No 4, which stands in the names of Mr Ford and Dr Farry, but I understand why some Members may be tempted to support it. However, I notice that it does not mention areas such as Armagh, Omagh and Dungannon. I will not be supporting that amendment.

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am finished, so I am happy to hear the Member's comment.

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for giving way as he sat down, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not think that Mr Elliott was in the Chamber earlier to hear my comments about the flexibility of boundaries — something that he spoke about. That is why it is appropriate to specify only one place — rather than a number of places — in each district. In Fermanagh, for instance, flexibility would be permitted so long as Omagh and Dungannon were to co-operate.

Mr Elliott: I appreciate the Member's comments, which I heard earlier.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will be aware that the Tuesday sitting usually suspends at 12.30 pm to allow the Business Committee to meet. However, we intend to continue today's sitting until 1.00 pm.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the amendments. First, I will speak to amendment Nos 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17 and 18, which seek to change the number of districts.

Mr Ford moved amendment No 1, and spoke on other amendments. Before I address the amendments, I acknowledge Mr Ford's comments about the work of

the Environment Committee on the Taxis Bill. On many occasions in the House, I have lauded the Committee for its work on the Taxis Bill, and, yesterday, I was pleased to receive a copy of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 — as I am sure were all Members.

Accelerated passage is not the norm, and it was used for the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill as a necessity; I have said that many times in the House. That is not the way in which I want to introduce legislation to the House. I have also given a commitment to the Committee for the Environment that we will continue with the rest of the review of public administration structure — including the local contracts Bill and the local government modernisation Bill — through the proper Committee procedures.

It was strange to hear Mr Gallagher's comments about accelerated passage, because he voted in favour of accelerated passage in the Environment Committee and in the House. I understand why Mr Ford made his comments, but I do not understand why Mr Gallagher felt the need to make his.

The Executive considered the council models that were available, and we settled on 11 councils. Contrary to Mr Beggs's assertion that my party was being Stalinist and that this was a back-door deal, the matter was on the Executive agenda, where it was discussed openly, and it was brought to the House at the earliest opportunity. Rather than be treated as a back-door deal, the issue has been discussed in the Committee, in the Executive and the House, and we have tried to be as open as possible.

Some Members acknowledged that the Assembly was up and running, and the Executive believe that, by opting for 11 councils, we have struck a measured and reasonable balance between reducing the range of variants that exist between councils — including population and rating income — while promoting and strengthening the links between councils and their communities.

I was disappointed with the lack of imagination that has been exhibited on how to engage with local communities, particularly by Mr Beggs. It is depressing that he can be so narrow-minded in that regard. It is hoped that others in the new councils will be more able to connect with their local groups — something that Mr Beggs seems unable to countenance. I refer him to the new community planning power, which has the ability to develop into something exciting for the community.

However, its success will largely depend on the new councillors' ability to deliver it; so, it will be up to them to maximise its potential.

In choosing the 11b model, we considered it to be the optimum model for integrating councils and communities so that the new structures would best meet the vision for local government. Amendment No

1 seeks to change the number of councils from 11 to 15. I have already outlined why I feel that that amendment should be rejected. The Executive have considered the issue and believe that 11b is the optimum model for 2011 and beyond. As I have said on many occasions, this is not a definitive end to the process; rather, it is the start of it.

Amendment No 2 seeks to introduce an entirely new approach, involving either 11 or 15 council districts or a number in between. When the Executive commenced their review of the number of council districts, it was made very clear that consideration would be restricted to the models already consulted on — that is, seven, 11 or 15 councils. No consultation or detailed work has been carried out on the impact of changing to 12, 13 or 14 councils. I have to say to Mr Gallagher that it is a case of speculative development at its very worst. Therefore, I will be rejecting amendment No 2.

In addition, agreeing to amendment No 2 would mean that the number of districts would be determined by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner rather than the Assembly. It would be a very sad reflection on this House if, after six years of debate on the issue, we shirk the responsibility of deciding on the matter and ask the commissioner to do so for us, without having consulted on it; a point that was made by my friend Mr Ross.

We have spent enough time over the past six years arguing about this issue in various forums. It is time for a decision to be made; in fact, the decision was long overdue, and, therefore, I urge Members to reject those two amendments. Not even a plea involving Fermanagh, my weak point, will move me on this occasion — Mr Gallagher and Mr Ford both attempted that. I also inform Mr Gallagher that, rather than not having a future, I believe that Fermanagh will have a very bright future in the new south-west council.

Several eloquent speeches were made about parliamentary constituencies and bringing coterminosity. Mr Farry again pleaded about Fermanagh being on its own, although to be fair to him, he did not fall into the trap of equating coterminosity with parliamentary constituency, a point that was largely missed by others. The reality is that, historically, Fermanagh has shared the provision of services with Omagh, be that through health, education, housing or the old L division in policing.

I listened carefully to the points that were made about policing and, indeed, when serving in another capacity on the Policing Board, I made the point that a decision on policing should not be made before a final decision on RPA was made. However, the Policing Board will have to deal with that issue by itself because, as I recall, the Patten Report makes it very clear that each district policing partnership will align with the relevant council.

The location of the south-west council's main base can be discussed by Fermanagh District Council and Omagh District Council in the transitional committees. I have every faith in my party colleagues' ability to argue in favour of their own council areas in Fermanagh and Omagh, and I hope that Mr Elliott will join in that debate instead of grandstanding — or bandwagon-travelling, which is what he usually engages in — about Omagh.

Although amendment Nos 3 and 4 seek to introduce different numbers of districts, both are attempts to change the remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. I have already stated the number of councils that the Executive considered to be most appropriate. Rather than listing the grouping of councils that will form the new districts, amendment Nos 3 and 4 specify single current districts.

Mr Farry stated that the last commissioner did not alter boundaries in any meaningful way. I think that he will acknowledge that that was largely due to the fact that people knew that a return to devolved Government was imminent, and it was expected that the proposal for a seven-council model would not stand; therefore, there were very few responses to the commission's consultations and public hearings. I do not imagine that that will be the case with this commissioner.

One of the advantages of an elected Assembly, and of debates on legislation, is that the new Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be able to read the Hansard reports in order to become aware of the mischief, or intention, behind the amendments. He or she will then be able to proceed with the job.

Leaving aside the rationale that may have been used to choose the districts that are mentioned in the amendments, what is supposed to happen to the districts that are not mentioned? The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner is given no indication as to what he or she should do with those districts. I suspect, and it was confirmed to me during the debate, that the amendments are an attempt to recreate a similar process to that which was used in 1971. In that instance, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner was given 26 population centres as the basis for the proposed districts. That reorganisation of local government brought together some 70 bodies, including county councils, urban district councils and rural district councils.

The situation is totally different now. Currently, we have a structure of 26 district councils. It is more logical to refer to those in the legislation by means of an amalgamation. I suggest to Mr Ford that picking out one particular district, which is presumably to be the cornerstone of a new amalgamation, without giving the commissioner the benefit of a steer as to what to do with the districts that have not been mentioned, is illogical and would cause confusion.

Amendment Nos 3 and 4 appear to give an indication of what districts are considered to be more important than others. For example, amendment No 4 mentions Fermanagh, but not Omagh, nor, indeed, Dungannon, which is also an important town in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Neither Carrickfergus nor Larne are mentioned, which I am sure will concern Mr Beggs. Many other districts have also been left out. We should not be trying to tie the hands of future councils by outlining in legislation what district should be central. It should be up to the councils to make those important decisions, especially given the discussions that took place last week about Carrickfergus and Ballymena.

Dr Farry again mentioned the issue of the names of councils. He will recall that during the previous debate on this issue, I stated that it will be a matter for the new councils to change their names if they are unhappy with the names that are given to them by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

I also note that Members said that they were concerned because they believed that the Executive have not consulted on the 11b model. That was despite nearly six years of consultation on that issue during RPA. However, the amendments also seek fundamentally to alter the remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. That has certainly not been consulted on.

By seeking to introduce an approach that is not based on amalgamations, the amendments would cause enormous practical difficulties in the implementation of the legislation, which is an issue about which all Members should be concerned.

Amalgamating groups of districts makes the transfer of assets and liabilities relatively straightforward. However, by basing new districts on the major part of a single district, and, presumably, parts of others, the process would be complex, time-consuming and expensive. Furthermore, we would not meet the timetable that has been set. If I were cynical, I would say that that is the objective behind some of the amendments, but I am not a cynical person.

For those reasons, I do not believe that the amendments would improve the Bill. On the contrary, they would serve to confuse and complicate the drawing of the boundaries, and would make the implementation of the new arrangements more difficult. Therefore, I urge Members to oppose amendment Nos 3 and 4.

Amendment Nos 5 and 6 also seek to alter the remit of the commissioner. Amendment No 5 would do so fundamentally by removing the approach of listing districts altogether, which would presumably give the commissioner the scope to alter the number and come up with whatever amalgamations seem appropriate. Amendment No 5 states:

"The new local government districts shall incorporate the former local government districts."

I wonder what else they could have incorporated. Rather than having the effect of setting the remit for the commissioner, the amendment is simply stating an observation of the facts. One of the primary purposes of the Bill is to set the context in which the commissioner is to conduct a review. Removing any reference to current districts simply expects the commissioner to pluck the new districts out of the air.

There was much debate in the House last week — and, indeed, today — about coterminosity. The Executive chose the 11b model on the grounds that, although it may introduce some challenges in achieving coterminosity, it will be able to be implemented as required. It is inappropriate to ask the commissioner to consider the practical reform arrangements when his or her primary role has to be to ensure electoral equality across districts.

12.45 pm

I think that it was Dr Farry who raised the issue of an equal electorate. The legislation states that the number of electors per ward in a district should be as equal as possible. However, that is not the case for district electoral areas, and that legislation does not specify that the electorate in each district must be equal.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for giving way. It was actually Mr Weir who made the arguments that she rejected. I agreed with the Minister.

The Minister of the Environment: Amendment No 6 — an Ulster Unionist amendment — seeks to make a much less radical change to the remit of the commissioner. However, the effects on the ease of implementation would be similar. The commissioner cannot possibly be asked to consider issues such as coterminosity when delineating electoral boundaries. Mr Kennedy made much of coterminosity with parliamentary boundaries, but then proposed amendment No 6, which removes the requirement for the major part of former districts to be incorporated into the new districts. That could lead to districts that are not coterminous with anything.

As Minister of the Environment, my job is not about making life easy for politicians, insofar as the ability to represent the same parliamentary constituency as an MP. My job — and the remit of the review of public administration — is focused on citizen-centred service delivery. Many of the arguments about coterminosity with parliamentary constituencies are rather self-serving.

Mr Kennedy also said that amendment No 6 would secure meaningful change to boundaries. I have already mentioned what happened in respect of the previous Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. As the legislation stands, I do not accept that the commissioner will not have the ability to make meaningful change. The legislation provides the commissioner with that ability — it is certainly not a straitjacket, as was alleged by Mr Beggs.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister explain the difference between “meaningful” and “major” changes? The Ulster Unionist Party has highlighted that issue. The Minister mentioned the view of some that, when the commissioner reads the Hansard reports, he or she will believe that, if amendment No 6 is not passed, he or she will not be allowed to make major changes. The Minister seemed to indicate that that is not the correct interpretation, so will she clarify how much scope there will be for the commissioner to make substantial changes to the areas concerned?

The Minister of the Environment: I made that very point during the Second Stage debate on the Bill. I raised that matter with the Member’s colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning. The legislation allows the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to consider the different areas and to decide which need to be moved to other council areas. The Member mentioned the fine borough of Castlereagh — his argument about removing the term “major” from the legislation was in fact a very good argument for keeping it in the legislation.

The last commissioner regarded “major” as a spatial term. That does not mean that the new commissioner will regard it in the same way, but I am sure that he or she will take legal advice on that matter. The new commissioner will not regard “major” as a term of art — that is something on which Members need to reflect. We heard much about common sense today, and that is a common-sense term. It will be up to the new commissioner to determine what “major” means when he or she considers the areas.

When consultations take place with the community and elected representatives, I am sure that the commissioner will listen very carefully to what is said. That remit is defined by legislation, and the readily identifiable areas are addressed in the second group of amendments. The new commissioner will consider the issue in a practical way. Current councils could be contained in the areas of other councils in the future.

Practical realism and common sense exist in the Bill in its current form. The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, and others, talked about practical realism. I, therefore, urge Members to oppose amendment No 6. Indeed, I reject all the amendments that are contained in the first group, and I urge Members to do the same.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when I will call Mr David Ford to make his winding-up speech.

The sitting was suspended at 12.50 pm.

2.00 pm

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair) —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr David Ford.

Mr Kennedy: Hear, hear.

Mr Ford: I am glad to have the enthusiasm of such a large proportion of those in the House this afternoon to greet my rising. *[Laughter.]*

I declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council — I believe that I did not do so at the start of my speech to move the amendments in my name. I should probably also declare that my roots are in west Tyrone, lest I infringe on Fermanagh any more, and incur the wrath of Mr Elliott or the Minister.

Dr Farry: Or me.

Mr Ford: Or even my Fermanagh-rooted colleague.

It seems to me — given the way in which the debate went this morning — that the House has been presented with a done deal. The DUP and Sinn Féin have made the arrangements, and we can expect votes to be cast accordingly. However, there are issues that deserve debate, that deserve an airing, and that were given a good airing this morning. The House ought to pay heed to that before voting. In that respect — although he is not present, I am sure that his colleagues will tell him — Mr Weir at least made an extremely good fist of arguing a case that was not terribly good, and we should welcome the fact that he is fulfilling Sammy Wilson's role this afternoon.

Unfortunately, I found the comments from Mr A Maskey and Mr Boylan, in reply to substantive points made by myself and colleagues from other parties at this end of the Chamber, distinctly unhelpful. We were presented with an utterly specious argument, claiming that we were talking about bums on seats. It was interesting that Mr Weir made the criticism that the effect of one of our amendments would be to reduce the number of councils — that was the complete opposite of the Sinn Féin Members' argument. At least Mr Weir utilised a simple element of arithmetic and accuracy in what he was saying.

I recognise the point that Mr Boylan made when he referred to those who were carrying out the role of official opposition. I welcome the support that the official opposition received from the two parties of the unofficial opposition, as we together attempted to make improvements to the Bill.

A number of issues have been covered, and I do not intend to go through each individual speech. Key issues were raised on the need to ensure that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has a degree more flexibility than some of us believe that the Bill, as currently drafted, will give him or her. Those points

were made emphatically by Tommy Gallagher and Patsy McGlone. There was an interesting exchange between the Minister and Basil McCrea concerning that element of flexibility, when it appeared that everyone was fighting not to have Castlereagh included in their council area, not even in Fermanagh. The issues around that showed —

The Minister of the Environment: The bent banana.

Mr Ford: The Minister wishes me to refer to the bent banana, and I will gladly address that issue. There are fundamental issues that suggest that the major part of Castlereagh must be added to the major part of Lisburn. If that is accepted, as drafted in the Bill, it will create difficulties. I want to talk about that a little bit more later on.

Some of the issues that were highlighted by a number of people, from different constituency interests, referred to geographical problems. In my introduction, I referred to Roy Beggs's version of the "East Antrim question", which may not have the constitutional significance of the West Lothian question, but is a significant issue concerning how east and mid-Antrim are dealt with. Patsy McGlone pointed out the fact that, under the seven-council model proposed by the old RPA, three counties were to be included in the Dungannon borough. I believe that he was wrong — I think that four counties were covered, as a small part of County Armagh was also to be included within that borough.

Danny Kennedy referred to an issue that had been raised on a previous occasion — a possible district council stretching from Crossmaglen to Crossgar. I am not sure whether he is now canvassing for votes in Crossgar, but that illustrates a key issue: the way in which the Bill is drafted pays little heed to any meaningful social boundaries. Stephen Farry made some very substantial points about the boundary in the southern and eastern parts of Belfast, which has not changed since 1898, despite huge changes in the social geography of that area. Tom Elliott referred to that geographical issue, and also raised the point, which has been made on a number of occasions, that coterminosity is damaged by those measures.

It will be impossible for there to be a close relationship between the health and social care trusts and this pattern of councils, which will create major difficulties.

There was some debate regarding the 15-council model, and about which party had, or had not, changed its mind. The main protagonists were Tom Elliott and Stephen Farry, who highlighted the perception of some Members that, until recently, the DUP favoured the 15-council model.

In an early bid to win the loyalty contest on the DUP's Back Benches, Mr Ross was at least accurate when he said that something must be done and that a decision must be made. Unfortunately, some of us consider that he favours the wrong decision. Mr Ross was subsequently trumped by his colleague Mr Weir, whose contribution I will mention later. Mr Spratt also competed for the award for the most loyal Back-Bencher — although the fact that he is a Chairperson of a Committee may disqualify him from the contest. *[Interruption.]*

Sorry; I thought that the Member was asking me to give way.

I must correct some of the arithmetic in which Mr Weir indulged last week during an exchange with the Minister. He informed the Assembly that Wales has a population of 3·5 million and has 22 councils. Mathematically, that would translate to 11 councils for Northern Ireland's population of 1·7 million.

However, according to official Government statistics, as opposed to those of the DUP, the population of Wales is approximately 2·9 million. If the ratio of population to council in Northern Ireland were to match that in Wales, on my count — and my calculation may be slightly inaccurate — there would be approximately 14·2 councils. That is so close to the 15-council model that the argument may have to be revisited.

Dr Farry: Further to the Member's last point, does he accept that councils in Wales exercise more powers than councils in Northern Ireland, and will do so even after the complete transfer of powers? Basing the case for having more councils on the size of the respective populations strengthens the argument for having 15 councils.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for introducing the next page of my speech. I was about to say that Rutland County Council in England covers a population of slightly over 38,000 but exercises full power over issues such as education and roads — something that no one has even proposed should apply to Belfast. In Wales, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council serves a population of only 56,000, and Clackmannanshire Council in Scotland serves a population of only 48,000.

The Minister's Fermanagh District Council serves a significantly larger population than English and Scottish councils that have far more power, and it is roughly equivalent to the Welsh councils that have somewhat less power than their neighbours. Given the level of powers in question, is the Assembly being realistic in saying that it cannot further devolve some powers?

Mr Weir said that the 11-council model strikes a balance between economic scale and remoteness, which is similar to a point made by Stephen Farry. However, the problem is that the arguments from the

DUP and Sinn Féin suggest that the 11-council model represents a balance between the options of having seven or 15. That perception has not been diluted by any meaningful arguments during debates last week or today. There was little quality in the argument from either Sinn Féin Member to explain why that party considers the 11-council model to be particularly good.

The debate turned to the discussion of whether the larger part of a council, an entire council, some part of a council, or none would transfer. Mr Weir effectively implied that the "larger part" would mean the entire council. I am sure that he did not mean to do so, but he almost suggested that the Minister would give direction to the commissioner that is beyond what is contained in the legislation.

Some of the Alliance Party's amendments concerning the definition of new councils by reference to only one council are being contradicted by the Minister and her colleagues. In that context, Members must consider how much flexibility there is in the Bill compared with how much flexibility the amendments proposed by the Alliance Party would offer.

I can be guided only by a previous interpretation that the "larger part" of a council means the majority of the land area. Therefore, it is consistent to use Mr Spratt's example that the two Carryduff wards and Moneyreagh would transfer from Castlereagh to Lisburn. That would constitute more than 50% of the land area but significantly less than 50% of the population and resources. That rebuts the argument that the introduction of greater flexibility, as sought by the Alliance Party, would make it difficult to transfer assets or, dare I say, debts.

That differs only marginally from what may happen anyway, which will be dependent on the representations that local people make to the commissioner. The alternative is that everything is already stitched up, which would mean that only a street or two in suburban Belfast and a townland or two in rural County Antrim would change from the current pattern of councils.

If that is the case, it seems that we are elevating the concept of speed above the concept of getting the pattern right for the next 30 years.

Mr Weir: The wording of the legislation simply refers to "the major part", which means, presumably, more than 50%. That allows for a lot of flexibility.

Will the Member not recognise that, because all 26 former councils are named — and, in that sense, ring-fenced — that it would be the institutions that transfer? Therefore, the issue of debt management and transfer of undertakings would not arise. However, if there was simply carte blanche to divide, without any guidance to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, that would create a whole range of problems such as working out what percentage

belonged to what council, and which council was the employing authority. Will the Member not realise that his proposals would create those problems, bearing in mind that the councils and the institutions would be merging, with allowance made for flexibility of boundaries?

Mr Ford: The Member makes an interesting point about the effect of the changes. However, if the three wards out of 23 wards in Castlereagh, which constitute more than 50% of the land area, are all that goes to Lisburn, I do not see how anyone can credibly say that Castlereagh as a whole has been joined to Lisburn.

Mr Weir: When Mr Spratt mentioned the three wards, he did not say that those should be the only areas that should go to Lisburn; he gave them only as examples. Therefore, it is wrong for the Member to suggest that those would be the only areas that should go to Lisburn.

Mr Ford: Legally speaking, if the Bill goes through unamended, those three wards will constitute more than 50% of the land area, which is the only guideline that we have for interpreting that particular element of the rules. I think that people in Moneyreagh would look more towards Ards than Lisburn, so I disagreed with the point as it was made by Mr Spratt.

Regarding the argument that, potentially, 15% or less of the borough might transfer in terms of population, resources and community facilities, that is an issue over which there will be ongoing problems. The only way to overcome those problems would be if the same processes were to be applied as were in 2006, when the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner made effectively no changes to the external area, with the exception of Magilligan Strand and Mussenden Temple. Those issues exist regardless, and to suggest that they are an argument against our amendments, is not to recognise the reality.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member agree that it is surprising that the word “major” now seems to be defined as “50 plus 1” and that if 51% of those three wards joined Lisburn on the basis of geography, that that would be a mockery as far as the majority of the population is concerned, assuming that the more populous wards in Castlereagh went to Belfast? That is a basic inconsistency that we should have had the opportunity to thrash out and get right.

Mr Ford: The Member makes a valid point. We should have had the opportunity to thrash out this matter in detail in Committee, but I will not revisit that issue. However, I acknowledge that the Minister, in her closing remarks, made it clear that she recognises the disadvantages of accelerated passage and that she has seen the benefit of a proper Committee Stage with regard to the Taxis Bill. I welcome her assurance that we will deal with other matters that come up under

RPA under the proper procedures of this House and that we will not regard this as a precedent — at least as far as the Department of the Environment is concerned.

The case is quite clear: we either acknowledge that we are talking about extremely modest additions to council powers and that, therefore, a larger number of councils is appropriate, or that, in fact, the Executive ought to go back to the drawing board and find more meaningful powers that would justify there being 11 councils.

2.15pm

The Minister of the Environment: I have made it clear on several occasions to the Member and, indeed, to other Members of the House, that the Bill is the start of the process. Will he acknowledge that? Given that an institutional review is ongoing in the Assembly, it may well be that other powers are ceded to councils. The Bill is only the beginning.

Mr Ford: Indeed, I acknowledge that and was about to refer to that fact because I have also said in this place that the idea that further powers may be granted to councils after a year does not seem to be the type of assurance that was expected when the RPA was initiated all those years ago. The Assembly should have known that more detailed proposals would be made.

I assume that the Minister has had limited time to seek to persuade the unpersuadable with whom she shares the Executive table. The fact is that the Assembly has been presented with a Bill that is not tied down in a way that justifies the dramatic reduction in the number of councils. The Bill contains rules that will make the composition of new councils excessively rigid.

For those reasons, the amendments that stand in my name and Dr Farry's, particularly amendment No 1, should be made by the House.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 19; Noes 52.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Armstrong and Mr B Wilson.

NOES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton,

Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Ross.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As amendment No 1 has not been made, I advise Members that I will not now call amendment Nos 3, 7, 9, 16 and 17, which are dependent on amendment No 1 being made.

Amendment No 2 proposed: In clause 1, page 1, line 3, leave out “11” and insert

“at least 11 and not more than 15 new”. — *[Mr Gallagher.]*

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 31; Noes 52.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Hanna and Mr O'Loan.

NOES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Ross.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 2 has not been made. I advise Members that amendment Nos 5, 8, 10 and 18 will not now be called, as they are dependent on amendment No 2 being made.

Amendment No 3 is dependent on Amendment No 1. As amendment No 1 has not been made, amendment No 3 will not be called.

Amendment No 4 proposed: In clause 1, page 1, line 4, leave out subsection (2) and insert

“(2) The 11 local government districts shall incorporate, respectively, the whole or the major part of the following former local government districts—

1. Ballymena.
2. Belfast.
3. Coleraine.
4. Cookstown.
5. Craigavon.
6. Derry.
7. Fermanagh.
8. Lisburn.
9. Newry and Mourne.
10. Newtownabbey.
11. North Down.” — *[Mr Ford.]*

Amendment No 4 negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 5 is dependent on amendment No 2. As Amendment No 2 has not been made, amendment No 5 will not be called.

Amendment No 6 proposed: In clause 1, page 1, line 5, leave out “the major”. — *[Mr Kennedy.]*

Amendment No 6 negatived.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

2.45 pm

Clause 2 (Local Government Boundaries Commissioner)

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 7 and 9 are dependent on amendment No 1. As amendment No 1 has not been made, I will, therefore, not call amendments Nos 7 and 9.

Amendment Nos 8 and 10 are dependent on amendment No 2. As amendment No 2 has not been made, I will, therefore, not call amendment Nos 8 and 10.

We now turn to the second group of amendments for debate. The first is amendment No 11, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 12, 13, 14 and 15. Those amendments concern the rules that the commissioner shall have regard to when making recommendations. I call Mr Danny Kennedy to move amendment No 11 and to address the other amendments in that group.

Mr Kennedy: I have been accused of making moving speeches in the House before, but I do not think that I am likely to move as many as I am about to move now. We will see when the votes are taken later on.

I beg to move amendment No 11: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() for paragraph 14 substitute—

‘14. Regard shall be had to the desirability of determining district and ward boundaries which—

- (a) are readily identifiable;
- (b) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (c) secure effective and convenient local government.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 12: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 14 insert—

‘and socially coherent’.” — [Mr Ford.]

No 13: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() for paragraph 15 substitute—

‘15. A townland shall not, except where in the opinion of the Commissioner it is unavoidable in the interests of maintaining social cohesion, be included partly in one district or ward and partly in another.’” — [Mr Ford.]

No 14: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 16 add—

‘(16A) The Commissioner shall make recommendations on the number and boundaries of districts having regard to the size, population and physical diversity of Northern Ireland, local identity and community ties and the representation of the rural and urban electorate.’” — [Mr Gallagher.]

No 15: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 17 add—

‘; and

(c) the desirability that wards may be easily grouped into readily identifiable and socially coherent district electoral areas.’” — [Mr Ford.]

Amendment No 11 reflects the broad consensus demonstrated in the House during last week’s debate on the Second Stage of the Bill. Across the House, Member after Member referred to the need for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to ensure that local government boundaries reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Despite the controversies over the merits of an 11-council model and accelerated passage, no Member dissented from the proposition that local government boundaries should reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

Perhaps I can point to the comments made during that debate by some Members from those parties that have proposed the 11-council model.

Mr Weir, a Member for North Down, stated:

“local identity must be one of the factors taken into consideration...Local identity is important, and that is one of the reasons why I believe that the seven-council model is not the right one.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p353, col 2].

He continued:

“To take local needs into account, it will be important that the commissioner has the level of flexibility that the Bill will provide.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p354, col 1].

Mr Alex Maskey said:

“I understand the need of communities to feel an affinity for their local councils, and to relate to, and have access to, those councils.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p347, col 1].

Mr Sammy Wilson emphasised that his reading of the Bill was that the commissioner would possess the power to establish boundaries that reflect the identities and interests of local communities. In response to Mr Ford, Mr Wilson said:

“The Boundaries Commissioner will work to terms that can deal with that. The rules for determining the numbers and boundaries of wards are the same: they will have regard for the size, population, physical diversity and the desirability for proper urban and rural representation. All those factors will be taken into consideration”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p350, col 2].

In response to Mrs Long, Mr Wilson continued:

“It is still possible to cater for social coherence, because the Bill’s terms of reference are wide enough to allow the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to take account of all such considerations.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p351, col 1].

That being so, amendment No 11 merely seeks to make explicit in the Bill what Members from the different political parties in the House believe should be the case: when determining the local government boundaries, the commissioner should have regard to the desire to reflect the identities of local communities.

One reason that due consideration should be given to amendment No 11 emerges from comments that were made in the March 2007 revised recommendations report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland. With regard to Belfast and its suburbs, the commissioner stated:

“I acknowledge that the expansion of the city has created suburbs where many continue to feel affiliation with Belfast. However, neither affiliation nor parliamentary boundaries are factors which may influence the delineation of local government district boundaries.”

Let us leave aside the issue of parliamentary boundaries. I respect fully the judgement of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and his understanding of the legal constraints within which he operates. However, his statement should give pause for thought to all those Members who have emphasised the need for local government to reflect local identities. Therefore, if honourable Members are correct in their understanding of the Bill, amendment No 11 clarifies that situation by making explicit what is implicit in the Bill and related legislation.

However, if the legislative context takes less favourable cognisance of local identities, amendment No 11 provides a necessary corrective that should find support from across the House.

It should be noted that amendment No 11 is careful not to make local identity the only grounds for a determination by the commissioner, or to state that it negates any other concerns. The amendment states:

“Regard shall be had to the desirability of determining district and ward boundaries which... reflect the identities and interests of local communities.”

That answers a concern expressed by Mr Weir during last week’s debate, when he said:

“a balance must be struck between local identity and the issues of economies of scale, the opportunity for efficiencies of delivery, population and the rates burden.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p353, col 2*].

In my view, and in that of my party, amendment No 11 strikes that balance. It also requires the commissioner to heed the need to secure effective and convenient local government, thus reflecting concerns expressed across the House that local government boundaries should take account of local identities.

However, the amendment does so in such a manner as to acknowledge other concerns that the commissioner must also take into account.

On 21 April 2008, during the debate on the accelerated passage of the Bill, the Minister said:

“There is no need to reinvent the wheel; this is a relatively straightforward piece of legislation.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p297, col 2*].

The Minister and I may disagree on a number of aspects of local government reform, but we agree on the fact that there is no need to reinvent the wheel, which is precisely why amendment No 11 is taken directly from the Local Government Act 1992 for England and Wales. The amendment merely updates the principal act referred to in the Bill — the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 — in light of legislation elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

In doing so, it allows the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to examine precedents and best practice on how the provision has been interpreted and implemented in England and Wales.

My party disagrees with the foundational principle of the Bill. We are in favour of having 15 local councils in Northern Ireland, rather than 11. However, that does not preclude those of us who hold such a view from meaningfully contributing to the legislative process. Indeed, on 22 April 2008, during the debate on the Second Stage of the Bill, Sammy Wilson stated:

“Amendments may be tabled that will improve the Bill; that is the point of this debate. I look forward to examining those amendments”. — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p352, col 1*].

I trust that Members will support amendment No 11, as it will improve the Bill. The amendment reflects the views expressed across the House during the Bill’s Second Stage. It will ensure that, irrespective of our debates over whether there should be 11 councils, as opposed to 15, we will provide a legislative framework to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner that will explicitly require the holder of the office to have regard to the desirability for local government boundaries to reflect the identities of local communities. I commend amendment No 11 to the House.

Mr Weir: I will try to deal with the issues as thoroughly as possible. I was not aware of the extent to which Mr Kennedy seemed to hang on my every word, so I will try to clarify matters for him. I hope that I will not spoil the new-found fan status that he seems to have afforded me.

When I spoke in the debate last week, I said that local identity will be important when determining the boundaries of the new districts. Indeed, had an amendment been proposed referring to the local identity of the 11 district councils, it would have been taken into account. I am less concerned about that. As Mr Kennedy pointed out, I went on to say that local identity was one factor — and I appreciate that amendment No 11 introduces a number of factors. If local identity were the overriding factor when determining the new boundaries, we could end up with 11 councils, 111 councils, or 1,011 councils, depending on how one defines the phrase “local identity”. However, local identity is clearly implicit when one is determining district boundaries.

I am sure that Mr Kennedy thoroughly read the text of what I said last week about local identity being one of the balancing factors considered when opting for 11 councils, as opposed to seven or 15. What I did not make reference to, and what I think is wholly inappropriate, if one is making local identity a key determinant when setting local government boundaries, is to look at the issue in terms of ward boundaries. That also applies to social coherence, which I will come to in a moment.

Local identity can make a difference when it comes to determining the boundaries of the 11 districts, and I think it will be taken into account. However, if it were to be taken into account when setting boundaries at ward level, it could be established by a village of 300 people or an estate of 5,000 people. Indeed, there could be little common identity between two areas within the same ward. That applies to my constituency of North Down, and it could also apply to Mr Kennedy’s constituency of Newry and Armagh.

For example, last week I mentioned two areas in the ward of Conlig — the village itself and, directly across the dual carriageway, a Housing Executive estate

called Breezemount. There is little interaction between the two, and, as the local council discovered recently when Breezemount was left without a community hall, its residents have no desire to cross the dual carriageway or to have any direct connection with Conlig.

Conlig, perhaps, represents a microcosm of wider issues of local identity. At the end of the main road in Conlig, instead of leaving the village, one can turn left into the new Beechfield estate — a middle-class, well-to-do estate. Beechfield residents have little interaction with the village of Conlig; their children do not attend the local primary school, they rarely shop in the village, and they do not consider themselves part of Conlig.

Distinguishing sensible ward boundaries is difficult, and having to have regard to local identities in that way would place an impossible burden on the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, because local identities vary massively in size and scale. To achieve consistency of representation on councils, and as wards are the building blocks for both DEAs and parliamentary constituencies, we must establish wards of a roughly similar size. Using local identity as a key determinant for ward boundaries is problematic.

3.00 pm

Mr Beggs: Mr Kennedy indicated that the wording of the amendment is lifted directly from the Local Government Act 1992, which applies in Great Britain, where it has operated effectively and in a balanced way. Why does the Member think that the legislation cannot operate effectively here?

Mr Weir: Northern Ireland has a more defined sense of identity, with more emphasis on villages, and so on. In England, the population of council areas varies massively. Although Belfast is a different case, I want a fair level of representation irrespective of location, and a situation whereby the same number of people live in each ward.

The Member mentioned the effect of the 1992 Act on councils in England. Councils operate differently in England, and, therefore, Members should wonder why such an amendment has not been adopted for any other kind of boundary discussion since 1992 in England.

I am puzzled about the meaning of “interests of local communities”, and I should like an Ulster Unionist member to elucidate that. Also, the proposer did not clarify the third part of the amendment. How is the boundary commissioner to judge what will

“secure effective and convenient local government”?

I am unsure what is meant by “convenient local government”, and I would appreciate an explanation. Had amendment No 11 focused solely on district boundaries rather than ward boundaries, it could have been applied to local identity.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member understand the argument in relation to the bigger picture, but think that its application at ward level is impractical?

Mr Weir: I hope that I understand the bigger picture. The relationship between district boundaries and local identity is already implicit in the Bill.

Because local identity is implicit in the Bill, there is no particular need to spell it out. Therefore, the amendment may be unnecessary. However, there seem to be particular problems when trying to apply the concept of local identity to wards, rather than to general districts. For example, many areas have been mentioned in the debate, such as Crossgar, Saintfield, Castlederg and the Clogher Valley, and I suspect that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will determine the local identities of those areas, among other matters. However, that will be very different from determining potential ward boundaries.

Mr B McCrea: I asked the Member that question for clarity. I thank him for allowing me to elucidate further. Is he aware of the concept of super-output areas, and the role that they play in statistical planning by trying to bring together groups of residents that might be deemed to have similar socio-economic issues? Will he accept that, when wards were originally planned, many years ago, the idea was that they would be roughly the same size and have roughly the same geography and the same type of houses?

As a rule of thumb, a ward would have consisted of approximately 1,000 homes and contain approximately 2,500 voters. However, due to development, the wards have become distorted over time. That is why we have had to establish super-output areas. Some highly populous wards contain many super-output areas of differing standards. However, in many rural areas, a super-output area is exactly the same as a ward.

The Member may view the cup as half full, rather than half empty. There is a principle of establishing local accountability and local identity, about which we have argued on other occasions. He asked what words such as “convenience” mean. Convenience is connected to locality. That is the real basis of what we are trying to establish. Mr Kennedy’s point was that there is general agreement that we ought to ensure that, where possible, similar identities are brought together, and we would welcome the Member’s support for that.

As I have said, that is not the only issue. If we have a problem at ward level, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be entitled to make a judgement on it. However, it is important to take on board the points that have been quoted from legislation in other jurisdictions. There is a very important point about making sure that boundaries reflect local identity.

Mr Weir: I was beginning to wonder, given that intervention, whether we would hit the target date of

2011 for implementing the new councils. Although Basil McCrea's super output is always good to hear.

First, we may say that a Boundary Commission should consider effective and convenient local government, but those are vague and ill-defined terms. No definitions of those terms have been provided. The more clear-cut the terms are —

Mr B McCrea: There is existing legislation.

Mr Weir: The terms are not clearly defined in amendment No 11.

Mr Basil McCrea mentioned ward boundaries in respect of local identity. Wards have always been building blocks, and, rather than shift away from using wards, in many cases — although the process has perhaps been held up due to the reform of public administration — the consistency of size of wards within local councils has, broadly speaking, been maintained.

The Member may not be aware that several Boundary Commissions have been convened since the reorganisation of local government in 1973. Those commissions have changed the boundaries of wards — with one exception, which actually changed the boundaries of a district. In many cases, districts have grown, and not only have the ward boundaries changed, but the numbers of wards in the districts have changed.

Ward boundaries have been readjusted in a number of constituencies. For example, North Down had 20 wards in 1973; 24 by the mid-1980s; and later that figure became 25. We should attempt to produce boundaries of similar sizes. Since the late 1990s, the process has been somewhat out of kilter. If there had not been a review of public administration, I suspect that another review and a Boundary Commission on the 26 councils would have been implemented. Some ward boundaries have become larger, or smaller, than they should have.

Our overriding aim should be to have wards of similar electoral sizes, to ensure equality of representation. There are Members of the House who, historically, have claimed that gerrymandering was a factor in the make-up of local councils. There was disparity in the sizes and boundaries of wards within council areas. It is important that wards within a district have a similar electoral size, so that no one can complain that one ward is bigger than another. The foundation stone of this Bill provides the necessary protection, and will produce wards of similar electoral size.

If local identity becomes a key factor in defining a ward, the door is thrown open to discussion about whether a particular ward has an electorate of 500, 1,000, 1,500 people, or whatever. We all know of wards within our respective constituencies that are vastly different in electoral size. Kilcooley is one of

the larger estates in my own constituency of North Down, and houses approximately 5,000 people; other Members could point to housing estates that are home to 500 or 600 people. Defining wards on the basis of local identity will create massive disparity.

I sympathise with the SDLP's amendment No 14. However, it makes a fundamental mistake — which I assume is a consequence of their earlier amendments — by making a recommendation on the number of districts. Amendment No 14 attempts to reopen debate on the number of districts — a matter that has already been voted on. The SDLP amendment is better, and more loosely defined than that of the Ulster Unionists, but its reference to the number of councils creates a further problem.

The Alliance Party's amendment No 13 refers to the concept of "social cohesion". All districts in Northern Ireland should comprise a mix of social types. The existence of various housing patterns — or the mixture of rural and urban dwellings, and so on — makes it difficult to define wards on the basis of social cohesion. I referred to the village of Conlig, which consists largely of Housing Executive properties, and within a few hundred yards is Beechfield, a new, middle-class housing estate.

There are myriad other examples where there is not much social cohesion between one side of the road and the other. In South Belfast, Taughmonagh and the Malone Road are geographically very close. Taughmonagh is too small to be an individual ward, and, therefore, has to be grouped with the Malone Road or another area. It is impossible to draw up boundaries and create wards that genuinely reflect social cohesion. Furthermore, it is difficult to clearly define social cohesion. The more uncertainty we create, the more difficult the Local Government Boundary Commissioner's job will be.

From a practical point of view, such a definition is almost impossible to achieve.

3.15 pm

Amendment No 15 refers to "socially coherent district electoral areas". It is difficult to ensure social cohesion in one ward: ensuring it within a district electoral area would be enormously difficult. It would be wrong to create wards in such a way as to give a nod and a wink to a District Electoral Areas Commissioner. That commissioner must have a free hand if his or her review is to be separate from that of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. The review of district electoral areas must be independent. Therefore, to have wards prematurely grouped would be wrong. It will always be difficult to ensure social cohesion either in wards or in district electoral areas.

The legislation clearly prefers that townlands remain undivided. Amendment No 13, however, would

permit division of townlands only on the grounds of maintaining social cohesion. That ignores the practical realities. For historical reasons, a townland might be heavily developed. Potentially, a townland might contain too many houses — and, therefore, too great an electorate — to be included in a single ward.

Elsewhere, a particular property might straddle two or three townlands, so that makes it difficult to avoid dividing townlands. Take the example of a golf club, parts of which are in different townlands. If townlands could not be divided, or if their boundaries were regarded as natural, it might lead to difficult situations, because ward boundaries may ultimately become boundaries between district council areas. As a result of that artificial definition, such a golf club might straddle two district councils and have to pay a proportion of its rates to one council and a proportion to another, which would be nonsensical. The legislation provides for townlands to be kept together where possible, but to make the maintenance of social coherence — which is nowhere defined — the only occasion for their division does not hold water.

Consequently, I urge the House to reject these five amendments and stick with the original Bill.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin also opposes these amendments. I do not want to rehearse all the arguments; however, I want to correct a Member who spoke earlier and alleged that, in a previous debate, I commented that balance related to striking a balance between seven- and 15-council models — the balanced position being an 11-council model. I have never associated the concept of balance with the number of councils. My rejection of that position is on the record. Sinn Féin has never argued that an 11-council model was a compromise between the seven- and 15-council models. My party has never for a moment argued that. Rather, it has argued for balance between communities within council boundaries.

I hope that the question of the number of councils has been dispatched. I suspect that we will return to the issues that were discussed during this morning's lengthy debate: nevertheless, Members who argued this morning and this afternoon about the number of councils fully addressed the subject. No credible rationale has been offered for 15 councils, and I hope that we have dispensed with that matter, at least for the time being.

I now turn to the rules by which the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner operates. All these amendments seek to circumscribe the commissioner's freedom to work. For the most part, the terms of the amendments are ill defined. Even where the intentions behind the amendments are good — and I do not concede that that is so — they are ill

defined. The current rules are adequate and are well understood. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will work subject to the clear understanding and practice that townlands, and readily identifiable areas, are not disrupted or distorted unnecessarily or without due cause. There are reasons that such disruption may occur, but the guidelines for the commissioner are sufficient to enable him or her to do the job.

The ultimate political decision has been taken by the Executive and by Members, and will hopefully be the eventual outcome. Political leadership must determine the scale of local governance, rather than asking a boundaries commissioner to determine what may be delivered. That is why the political decision and judgements have already been agreed by the parties.

What we are dealing with is the way in which the commissioner will work, and the rules being set out for that are adequate and appropriate. Whenever I read amendments such as amendment No 11, which states:

- “(b) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (c) secure effective and convenient local government.”

I do not understand what those phrases mean. Does “convenient local government” mean that the proposers want 26 councils or 30 councils? Do they want a council in every district? I am sad to hear some Members talking —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maskey: You would not give way earlier, but I will be very generous.

Mr Beggs: The Member acknowledged that the earlier part of the debate centred on the number of councils. This amendment relates purely to the boundaries and ward boundaries of those councils. It is misleading to reopen part of the debate which has already been determined.

Mr A Maskey: Thank you, Mr Beggs, but I did correct one of your colleagues earlier —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Maskey: time after time I remind you that you must refer all of your remarks through the Chair. I gave you some leeway this morning when you did something similar, so please refer all future remarks through the Chair.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. You have been very kind, generous and gracious and I will seek to —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maskey: I would be glad to.

Mr Weir: Perhaps the phrase “convenient local government” means that local government is like a convenience store and that we are going to have a council based in every Spar.

Mr A Maskey: You could always give out Green Shield stamps to encourage people to come in. As I have said, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be very responsive to your generosity.

My point about these amendments is that they are ill-defined. I have referred to Members talking about secure, effective, convenient local government. I have also heard the phrase “socially coherent” being used. That phrase has come from the Alliance Party, which more often than not, tells us that there is very little social coherence. Indeed, one of its biggest arguments concerns the duplication of public services due to the fact that we do not have a coherent society. Either we have a coherent society or we do not, and I would argue that in many places we do not.

How is the phrase “socially coherent” to be defined? Does it mean, as Mr Weir has referred to, the nice districts and the not-so-nice ones, or settled districts and unsettled districts? I do not know. There is no clear definition of what it means. However, the task of securing social coherence will be at the heart of local government. That is why I continually remind Members of other parties who object to some of the provisions on offer, which have been tabled by the Minister in recent times, to examine the substance of those proposals.

Members must apply their minds to the substance and requirements of enabling local government in the future. Our real task as parties, collectively, is to attain and secure social coherence. That can be done with good governance arrangements, local government structures, community planning provisions and good relations obligations. That would be better than trying to write social coherence into the guidance for the boundaries commissioner, who in my view could not interpret that phrase realistically.

Amendment No 14 from the SDLP states:

“having regard to the size, population and physical diversity... local identity and community ties”.

I do not know what some of those ideas are supposed to mean. I have heard Members speak of physical diversity. We have had a bizarre outline of social and physical barriers. The Assembly is discussing small areas, which are not far apart — they are not like the Amazonian jungle or the Asian continent.

I accept the need to ensure, as far as possible, that communities will feel comfortable within their local council boundaries. That is clear, and I have said that on record on behalf of Sinn Féin. We have always held that position. By the same token, one cannot say that many of the local councils, as they stand, are acceptable to a lot of the people who live in them. They are not comfortable with them, and that is why they want changes.

Some of today’s amendments border on incoherent, particularly amendment No 14, which was proposed by the SDLP. It mentions four or five criteria on which the commissioner could make his or her recommendations, and I defy any Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to interpret those in a realistic or meaningful way.

The intent behind the amendments may be genuine — and I will not second-guess Members’ intentions — but the amendments are ill defined and difficult to interpret.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. As he knows, I always give way to him. Alex Maskey says that it is difficult to understand the language that is used in some of the amendments. However, we tried to avoid such confusion by lifting regulations from legislation that had been used before, which has been around for some time, and is tried and tested. There should be no difficulty in understanding the language.

We are entitled to do things differently, but it would have been better if we had been able to take the Bill through Committee, discuss it and work out what is going on. I am not demurring from Alex Maskey’s position that it is important that communities feel comfortable in their councils, and we will examine the safeguards. However, does he agree that there is no point in putting artificial communities together? We have talked about this matter in different guises, but the question about whether Castlereagh belongs to Belfast or Lisburn is one of those elephants in the room that we must get right now, because things will be easier for the commissioner if clarity is achieved.

The Ulster Unionist Party is suggesting that we adopt previously used legislation to clarify what is in the minds of every Member. That does not preclude the important points that Alex Maskey raises; it adds to the motion. That is why we ask for Members’ support.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his contribution — we are moving closer to 2012. I can read and understand the amendments, but they are ill defined. Just because similar language is used elsewhere, that does not make it right or appropriate in this case. The Member would be wise to remember that.

The amendments may be well intended — and I am not second-guessing whether they are — but they are not workable. There are adequate provisions at the disposal of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, and I will rely more substantially on the outcome of this exercise when parties apply their minds to the way in which local government will function. Safeguards and guarantees must be established to ensure that social coherence is delivered, and that will be the responsibility of local leadership and the Assembly.

Sinn Féin opposes the amendments because adequate safeguards are built into the current rules. Most parties agreed, in other formats, to the vision that has been set down for local government. However, Members have introduced arguments that they did not mention until now. I know that because I have worked on this matter with other Members for a number of years, in local government, on the Strategic Leadership Board and on the Local Government Reform Task Force. All parties have had ample opportunity to discuss those concepts.

I have heard party representatives say that they need more time and they should have more time; I do not know why that is so. On one hand, they criticise Sinn Féin and the DUP for rushing the Bill, but we have been able to make decisions. Other parties may not agree with those decisions — as is their entitlement — but they cannot say that they have not had enough chances to debate the issues.

3.30 pm

I want to know why the Members who are saying that we are only using accelerated passage for the Bill because we have dithered have not themselves produced very firm and specific proposals. These amendments are aspirational; they may sound good, but they will not achieve anything. On that basis, we oppose the amendments.

Mr Gallagher: I assure Peter Weir — who I notice is not here, so I may not get a question from him — that amendment No 14 has not been tabled for the reason that he suggested; that is, to re-open the debate about council numbers. We have had that debate.

My party tabled amendment No 14 because of the importance that we attach to community identity and to keeping neighbourhoods intact. Members are all aware — and have seen it strongly evidenced throughout today's proceedings — that we are dealing with a Bill that is based on a rigid decision, which itself is the outcome of negotiations between the DUP and Sinn Féin.

The reason that we have tabled amendment No 14 is because we are quite sure that, when the commissioner completes this body of work, problems will arise regarding community links and how intact neighbourhoods will remain. Now is the time to take account of those issues.

I acknowledge that much the same issue has been raised in other amendments. We must remember that this Bill is the outcome of a negotiation and that we have seen the outcomes of other negotiations on matters such as victims and policing. We know that those two parties intend to make such deals stick, and it does not seem to be a priority for them if a few little communities, neighbourhoods or parishes must be split in the interests of getting this Bill passed. I want to assure the House that it is a priority for the SDLP.

The Bill mentions protecting such communities to some extent, in relation to ward boundaries. However, that is only one part of the issue. The other part of it is to keep neighbourhood and community identity intact in relation to council boundaries. The Bill should mirror the concerns at both those levels, and that is why I urge Members to support amendment No 14.

Mr Ford: I want to speak about the second group of amendments, particularly the three amendments tabled by the Alliance Party, and to broadly endorse the comments made by Danny Kennedy and Tommy Gallagher.

The Minister may have felt that some of the first group of amendments proposed from this end of the Chamber were designed to damage the progress of the Bill — that was not the case, but perhaps she felt that it was. Normally the paranoia comes from elsewhere in the Chamber, not from her. The Alliance Party amendments in the second group cannot be regarded in the same way, as they are all designed to improve the process and the procedures by which the commissioner operates, and to ensure that we get a better pattern of local authorities than would otherwise be the case.

The booklet outlining the boundaries for the seven-council model that was drawn up and published in 2007 is proof that such amendments are necessary, because it contains numerous examples of how dubious the boundaries were when they were drawn up in accordance with the rules that the Bill, as presented, does not wish to change. The fact that there have been some fairly specious arguments against our amendments says more about the unwillingness of some people to listen than it does about the seriousness with which those amendments were tabled.

Unfortunately, Peter Weir is still not in the Chamber —

A Member: He has just returned.

Mr Ford: He is right on time — it would have been too much of a disappointment for him to have missed both Tommy Gallagher's contribution and mine.

The Member does not seem to recognise that the term "desirability", which is a direct lift from paragraph 14 of the existing rules, and is used in one of our amendments, applies to another amendment.

There are clearly limits as to what can happen to ensure that everything desirable happens at once. Our amendments are not an attempt to lay down hard-and-fast rules, nor are the Ulster Unionist Party or SDLP amendments, which refer to issues such as social cohesion. The amendments merely reflect the clear desirability for the legislation to lead to such cohesion.

Under the local government pattern that presumably would have persisted had direct rule continued, I live in what would have been called the Tardree ward of "bent banana" district council. That ward is drawn up to include housing on the edges of Randalstown, the

northern fringes of Antrim, past Templepatrick and Parkgate to south of the Six Mile Water. There is no logic to that whatever, except to draw a line on a map in order to create the appropriate electorate.

In particular, as a measure of internal boundaries, as opposed to the external boundaries of the district council, the drawing up of that ward used main roads — specifically the M2 — for a large part of the area. Motorways may or may not be a suitable social barrier in urban areas; however, they are no recognition of the patterns of social life as they exist in rural areas. On that occasion, the commissioner abandoned the rules to use townlands as boundaries, and instead decided to use the M2.

If that example is not bad enough, Members should consider that of the proposal for the Clondeboy ward. It contained areas that were postally in Bangor, Newtownards, Holywood and Belfast. How can that ward possibly represent the way that people live their lives, given that it sprawls across the countryside of those areas? I cannot see how that can represent fairly what is needed on the ground. That example proves why the rules need to be tightened.

Mr Weir: Although I appreciate Mr Ford's points, the postal argument should not be used to decide whether an area should be in one ward or another. For example, if a letter were addressed correctly to Conlig, there would be no reference to Newtownards. However, since the reorganisation that occurred in 1973, Conlig has been part of the North Down Borough Council area. Quite often, postal issues lead to anomalies. Therefore, that is not a strong argument on which to base local identity, unless the Member is a postman.

Mr Ford: That is a fair point, and I am not a postman.

A further example that could be used is the Shane's Castle ward, which is the area directly south of the proposed Tardree ward. That ward was drawn up under the rules just over one year ago, and includes housing estates in Randalstown, the Shane's Castle Estate, which is another substantial area of countryside, and a large part north of Antrim town stretching across to Holywell Hospital. I accept that that area is all postally in Antrim, but it includes at least two completely separate and distinct communities. The problem was that it was possible to draw up the rules in that way because they were sufficiently loosely specified and there was no requirement for social cohesion. The main requirement was that the electorate should be as near equal as possible.

Another example is a chunk being taken out of Glengormley, added to a piece of Rathcoole estate and spanning an industrial estate and the Valley Park. There is no logic to the way that the rules currently allow boundaries to be drawn up. That is why there is a need to strengthen that particular aspect of the rules.

Dr Farry: Further to the Member's points, does he also recognise that the process of devising wards that stretch across large swathes of territory and take into account different settlements will complicate significantly the process of drawing up district electoral areas in any subsequent process?

The example of the Clondeboy ward, which has already been cited, shows how the rules tend to negate the possibility of drawing up a district electoral area that is based around Holywood or one that is based in Bangor because we would end up with a ward that stretches across a large piece of territory. There would either be a Holywood ward that goes into large parts of Bangor and around the ring road, or a Bangor-based district taking in large parts of Holywood. Surely that does not make social sense.

Mr Ford: My colleague has been reading my notes yet again.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: Perhaps I should just let you two fire ahead.

Mr Weir: Had there been a seven-council model, with the previous boundaries in place, would the problem not have been that there were insufficient numbers in Holywood to constitute a five-ward district electoral area, no matter what way the boundaries were drawn?

Perhaps Mr Ford should sit out this discussion. Whatever method was used to draw the boundaries — unless one switched to a three- or four-ward district electoral area, which is clearly something that is not particularly desirable — there simply was not the population under the proposals of the seven-council model to constitute a Holywood district electoral area.

Mr Ford: I am not terribly well acquainted with greater North Down, as it will become. As I am not going to let my colleague continue to answer Peter Weir's points on that issue, I will give that matter a miss.

Obviously, there are issues concerning that specific area of which I am not fully aware. The fundamental point is that, by creating wards that have no social coherence, which stretch from one town to another, one will inevitably end up with incoherent district electoral areas. That is not a positive way forward. The rules could be used to instruct the commissioner to take regard of what is logical. That would ensure that a pattern of local government is achieved that appeals more to local people — who understand the areas in which they live and who can see representation working on the basis of how social networks operate.

That does not mean that ward boundaries should be drawn between nasty working-class people and nice middle-class people. It simply means that there are cases in which joining a ward across a chunk of countryside, from one town to another, does not lead to any social coherence and does not meet the needs of

local people in any meaningful way. Those issues need to be considered carefully, specifically in respect of the district electoral areas.

I acknowledge that the Minister has spoken to the Secretary of State about the early appointment of a district electoral area commissioner. That commissioner will work alongside the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, rather than waiting until that job is completed. However, surely it would be logical to formally instruct the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to note the desirability of wards being grouped into readily identifiable and socially coherent district electoral areas. That should not be an obligation, but the commissioner should be obliged to consider desirability against all the other factors, of which the key one is to ensure equal electorates. Based on what the Minister is already doing, those arguments were advanced by Mr Weir. He is almost beginning to agree with me, although I am quite sure that he does not think so.

The Alliance Party believes that there is virtue in requiring wards to be socially coherent. That would avoid huge geographical monsters, reminiscent of the “Massachusetts salamander”. Some of the wards are such awkward shapes. That is not because they are gerrymandered for electoral purposes — it is because they are put together in a way that does not reflect reality.

There are valid reasons to tell the commissioner that townlands are the building blocks in rural areas. The previous commissioner did not note that. Main roads are frequently areas where people meet rather than divide, so drawing a line down a main road is a bad way to draw the internal wards.

Some of the minor messing that was done to boundaries made no difference at all. The boundary between Antrim and Ballymena — or, as I should call it, north-east and bent banana — was varied in two places for no particularly good reason. There was not a single person who lived in the affected area, but switching from a townland boundary to one that runs down the middle of two roads seems to be of no purpose.

Amendment No 13 effectively instructs the new commissioner not to make such changes. Amendment No 15 makes clear that — unlike the Northern Ireland Parliament more than 30 years ago — single-member wards, of any meaningful nature, are not expected. It is, therefore, logical that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner should be instructed to have regard for the potential for creating coherent district electoral areas that would ensure an ongoing positive pattern of local government.

Mr Ross: I will try to speak only about the second group of amendments, and not go over issues that have already been decided by this House, such as accelerated passage. I also noted that some of the contributions thus far mentioned shady back room deals between the

DUP and Sinn Féin. However, all those decisions were agreed by the Executive, which are the decision-making body that the Assembly holds to account.

3.45 pm

This group of amendments aims to restrict the boundaries commissioner in his or her deliberations and tries to tie in some rather abstract concepts. They also make assumptions on centres for new council areas. I do not believe that the commissioner could be able to reflect some of those defined communities, as, in some cases, there is no simple definition of what those communities are. As some Members have said previously, although the concept behind some of the amendments is well intended, I am yet to find anyone in the community who is particularly exercised about which ward he or she is in. It is a nice concept in theory, but it is not a simple concept, because identity never is.

Our sense of community is changing as people move in and out of different areas as never before, and our sense of community is not what it used to be. Indeed, as Mr Weir said, perhaps our best sense of community is found at a more local level, such as a village or a street. However, that would lead to quite a few councils.

Amendment Nos 12, 13 and 15 mention the concept of social cohesion — although I am not entirely sure what that actually means in practice, and there is little explanation. That strikes me as a trendy term that, in practice, means very little. However, it would be challenging if some areas that are located closely together did not have very much in common. Mr Weir referred to some places where there would be massive differences between two areas that are geographically close — those areas would not have much in common but would not be big enough to constitute individual wards. Local identity is important, but I do not anticipate a massive public outcry if one’s sense of identify or community is not the same as someone else’s. The most important issue for constituents is that they receive the right delivery of services, irrespective of what ward they may be in.

It has already been said that it is important to strike a balance between having too many locally based councils that would not have the efficiency and effectiveness of local government, and the sense of remoteness that we could engender from having too few councils. However, it is important for the commissioner to establish areas that carry the same weight in votes and have the same level of representation. The commissioner must be able to come to his or her own determinations over boundaries and how they are composed, and reach an independent judgement based on the representations that will be received. That is why the commissioner will be given that task and why people, including Members, will

have the opportunity to make representations to the commission.

We should allow the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner the freedom to do his or her job and not tie him or her to nominal concepts that do not have any meaning. Therefore, I oppose the amendments.

Mr Armstrong: One of the most basic principles of democracy is that those who are elected should represent people and not the places where they live, and the legislation on local government boundaries seems to have missed that point. There is clearly an anomaly, because the legislation is based on Westminster's Local Government Act 1972, which has never been updated to take into account the changing times.

For some reason, the legislation relating to Westminster elections was updated in line with the regulations to be applied in Great Britain. I refer to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's fifth periodical report of parliamentary constituencies, whereby, in giving effect to the rules set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, the commission reviewed the set of principles on which its decisions had been based during the period of its fourth periodical report of parliamentary constituencies, and revised those to take account, as far as reasonable, of any local ties that would be broken by such alterations.

Appendix B of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's fifth periodical report of parliamentary constituencies, stated:

"When the present local government wards were determined they were intended to be indicative of areas with a community of interest."

Unfortunately, the regulations applying to local government were somewhat overlooked, leaving us with the existing outdated legislation. Too often in the past, electoral boundaries were drawn up that made no sense to the people who lived in a particular area.

Lines on a map that might seem fine to someone sat in an office in Belfast, or even London, fail to reflect the identities and interests of local communities on the ground. The language of the Ulster Unionist Party amendment — amendment No 11 — is very specific, and is lifted directly from the Local Government Act 1992, which affected England and Wales. No one can seriously argue that boundaries should not be readily identifiable, should not reflect the identities and interests of local communities, or should not secure effective and convenient local government.

Amendment No 11 is an attempt to bring Northern Ireland's local government legislation into line with legislation for similar elections in the rest of the United Kingdom and the arrangements for Westminster elections held in Northern Ireland. I cannot see anything in the amendment that should not be supported by any Member in the House. I support amendment No 11.

Mr K Robinson: I declare an interest as a member of Newtownabbey Borough Council, and also as someone who has suffered under boundary changes. I have lived in my current home for some 30 years, and during that period, without moving house, I have been transferred from the East Antrim constituency into South Antrim, and back into East Antrim again. In Newtownabbey, we suffer in particular from the difficulties that arise from parliamentary constituencies.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr K Robinson: No, I am sorry; I want to develop this point.

There are three MPs representing Newtownabbey. Whether that is a bonus or a detriment I will leave for the House to decide. The three constituencies come together, making it very difficult sometimes for people to actually identify where they are. Coming down to council boundaries, situations arise such as that found in my own area of Newtownabbey — the university area — where four of the council wards are a part of the South Antrim constituency, and three of the wards are part of East Antrim. Several wards that once upon a time were in Newtownabbey are now in the North Belfast constituency.

The electorate get more disenfranchised and disenchanted when there is a councillor or an MP who perhaps has worked for them previously, and suddenly that person cannot cross a road. Some of my colleagues will recognise Fernagh Road in Newtownabbey, the right-hand side of which is part of North Belfast, while the left-hand side belongs to East Antrim. What can be done when there is a hole in the middle of the road?

I would have thought that this Bill represented an opportunity to rectify some of the anomalies that have arisen, both at parliamentary and local council level, and, of course, in relation to the membership of this House. There is an opportunity to address those anomalies and to bring the electorate closer to the democratic process. We have all seen how, over the years, electoral turnout has decreased again and again. I suspect that one of the reasons for that is that people are not identifying as strongly with districts and local political representatives as they could and should. If we look at our boundaries as we are moving through this process, that will give us an opportunity to rectify at least some of those issues.

All politics is local, and people really do identify with someone whom they see out on the ground — someone who is around and who is dealing with the local issues — and that translates beyond the local councils into the membership of this House under its current structures. If there were more support for the amendments, there would be a last-ditch opportunity to address some of those issues and to make democracy more accountable and more relevant to folk on the ground.

There is also a social aspect to the issue. The Monkstown ward in my constituency would, in any other situation, score highly on several indices, which would bring money pouring into that area. Unfortunately, part of the area incorporates Jordanstown, where social deprivation is not as noticeable, shall we say. That tends to skew the amount of help that can be directed to solving the social problems in the Monkstown area. There are opportunities here to address social issues as well as democratic issues and issues of identity and local character.

The parliamentary constituency of East Antrim, as it currently is, can be taken as an example. It stretches from Cloughfern, on the fringes of Belfast, up to Carnlough in the Antrim glens. It is a beautiful rural constituency around the Carnlough area, and at the other end an equally beautiful area around Cloughfern — including Carnmoney hill, part of the Belfast hills complex — and yet obviously a very urban setting.

It is difficult to stretch a single identity between those two points. However, the two easily identifiable areas of Larne and Carrickfergus, and some smaller settlements, are located between them. The Minister must examine closely how to address such problems.

Mr Weir: I understand the Member's point, and I appreciate his circumstances. I suspect that he is not unique in Northern Ireland in finding himself living in different parliamentary constituencies due to boundary changes. He asserted that, while living in the same house, he has been in three different constituencies. However, had the council boundaries been based on the parliamentary boundaries, he would have been in three different council areas as well.

Mr K Robinson: I do not accept that argument. The First-Minister-in-waiting, Mr Robinson, is referred to on page 62 of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's fifth periodical report on parliamentary constituencies, which was published in March 2008. It states:

"In asserting that Cregagh ward is part of East Belfast he [Peter Robinson] highlights issues of family connections, culture, sport, church life, transport, work and return patterns."

There are, therefore, additional considerations to those that Mr Weir highlighted. On page 75 of the same publication, Mr Dodds:

"spoke of no doubt in his mind that the people in the Crumlin and Woodvale wards would regard themselves as being in North Belfast, as would others currently in the Court DEA wards within Belfast West, in terms of community, social, family and shopping linkages."

When I worked as a schoolmaster on the Shankill Road, there was always a political difference between the right- and left-hand sides of the road, but try telling that to the people of the Shankill Road — I doubt that they would agree.

I ask the Minister to reflect on some of the points that I and other Members have made in support of the amendments.

Dr Farry: I support the second group of amendments, particularly those tabled by the Alliance Party. The first group of amendments, discussed this morning, proposed significant changes to the direction of the Bill. There was a major difference of opinion in the House between the DUP and Sinn Féin, and the other three parties.

The second group of amendments represents a genuine attempt to improve the Bill given the direction in which the Minister, her party and Sinn Féin wish to take it. These amendments do not radically change the Bill, but are designed to ensure that the Assembly does its job as a legislature by improving legislation. In this case, the Assembly has been denied the opportunity to improve the Bill through a Committee Stage, which would have teased out these issues. Today's debate forms part of a severely curtailed process in which amendments have been tabled at short notice, and parties have not been given enough time properly to consider the issues.

Had the Minister and her officials taken the time to examine the 2006-07 report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, they would have found clear evidence to support the Alliance Party's stance today. We want logical wards that form the basis for logical district electoral areas. It is not a matter of seeking party-political advantage; we want to ensure that the coherence of communities is reflected in electoral units and extends to electoral representation.

Enumeration districts exist within wards, but the wards are important when it comes to the census and TSN. I will cite one example from my North Down constituency: the Harbour ward in Bangor is a TSN area for which we are trying to attract money. Under the new proposals, it would merge with the Princetown Road, which is one of the wealthiest areas in North Down. That would dilute the focus on the Harbour ward as an area of disadvantage. The new ward would be called Bangor Marina, which would send out the wrong message about that area. It would be very hard to make a pitch for targeting social need in the Bangor Marina ward. That is one example of many.

4.00 pm

The wards that have been drawn up in both urban and rural areas are flawed in various ways. After the last Boundary Commission review, my party went through the report in detail and tabled a number of amendments in an attempt to tidy up maps and to respect natural communities. Some of the amendments were accepted; quite frankly, however, it is not the job of political parties and local people to take the initiative and to try to fix problems at the eleventh hour. If the

Local Government Boundaries Commissioner had a proper mandate, many problems could be avoided.

In Belfast, for example, guess what ward Crumlin Road prison is in? The answer is not Crumlin. Surely it is logical to have Crumlin Road prison as part of Crumlin ward? People might suppose that all of the village of Crossgar, in the Down district, is in Crossgar ward, but they would be mistaken. A sliver of Crossgar is going to be portioned off into a different ward. The Crossgar ward is going to stretch right across the rural hinterland and take in the fringes of Saintfield. That is not logical in any shape or form.

It could be argued that, in the end, this is simply about drawing lines on a map, and it does not really matter. However, the process of drawing up wards will, inevitably, feed into the drawing up of district electoral areas. Whenever wards take in fringes of settlements, with other parts going off to different wards, that immediately constrains the flexibility for drawing up coherent district electoral areas. Inevitably, district electoral areas are then drawn up that do not reflect common sense, touching a range of communities, yet some of those communities not having a single focus for elected representatives. That makes a difference when people want to make representations to local representatives.

Another example from my area is Helen's Bay, a coherent community in North Down that is having a lot of difficulties regarding planning. Many old houses in the area are being demolished, and there is a lot of garden grabbing. The local community is, naturally, exercised by that and they want to approach their local representatives about the matter. The problem with Helen's Bay, however, is that it is split between Holywood and Bangor West. Under the provisional boundary recommendations last year, the village of Helen's Bay was to continue to be split between two wards. Therefore, there is still no focus for that community in respect of going to locally elected representatives to have their problems solved.

There are too many examples of wards that are dumb-bell or doughnut in character. In dumb-bell wards, major centres of population are at either end of the ward, with sparsely populated, rural areas in between; while, with the doughnut effect, the ward is populated around the fringes, with playing fields or open spaces such as parks in the middle. That creates difficulties and does not make a lot of common sense. Therefore, drawing up district electoral areas can result in one part of that fringe hanging in the wind, with the focus of that area based elsewhere.

The situation could be improved if the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner gave some thought to social coherence when drawing up boundaries. He or she would not be bound by that, but he or she

should bear it in mind. Social coherence is not about segregation on the grounds of religion or class — and the Alliance Party is not talking in those terms when it talks about social coherence. We are talking about creating and reflecting natural communities, where people live and interact, and respecting and preserving such areas. When we ask the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to show some consideration towards district electoral areas, we are not trying to tie his or her hands.

My party is simply seeking to ensure that consideration is given to how wards eventually join up with one another. In my experience, that was not the case last time around.

Although I appreciate that the Minister is making efforts to streamline the process between the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, who will follow, at present, there is no formal requirement on the Boundaries Commissioner to give any consideration to the process that will come afterwards. Although, in some people's minds, the processes may be separate, in my mind they are inextricably joined. If the Assembly is serious about joined-up Government, this Bill offers a clear opportunity for some joined-up thinking. Even at the eleventh hour, I plead for greater consideration to be given to the second group of amendments, given that they have been tabled with the sincere aim of trying to improve this piece of legislation.

The Minister of the Environment: I accept absolutely that the amendments, particularly those put forward by Dr Farry's party, have been made with sincerity. However, I intend to go through the reasons why they would cause more confusion than provide clarity.

I will start with amendment No 11, which seeks to introduce equivalent provisions in the Bill to those contained under the Local Government Act 1992 in England. I must say that seeking to use those provisions backs up the old saying that there is no need to innovate when one can imitate. It is disappointing that Members have decided to simply lift elements from other legislation when, in fact, there are considerable differences, which I will explain, between English legislative procedures and those in Northern Ireland.

Legislation in England provides that in carrying out a review, the Boundary Committee for England must have regard to equalising the number of electors who are represented by each councillor; community identity; and convenient and effective local government. Much has been made of the fact that that works in England. I refer the House to the Boundary Committee for England's 'Electoral reviews: Technical guidance', which was published in February 2008. It refers to both issues: community identity, and convenient and

effective local Government. Paragraph 5.20 of the document states:

“The other two main considerations we are required to take into account are harder to define, as they cannot be measured can often mean many different things to different people.”

Paragraph 5.24 goes on to state:

“Effective and convenient local government is also difficult to define.”

The Boundary Committee for England published another paper, entitled ‘Electoral Reviews: what they are and how you can get involved’, which states:

“Equalising the number of electors represented by each councillor is only one of the considerations we are required to take into account that can be measured objectively. By contrast, the other two main factors — reflection of community identity and convenient and effective local government — are more subjective”.

I agree with those sentiments. I am not enthusiastic about requiring the Boundaries Commissioner to make subjective judgements.

Although it may be attractive to lift items from a Great Britain Act and add provisions from GB legislation to the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill, the two systems are not ad item. In England, the system for reviewing boundaries is different. The Boundary Committee for England can carry out electoral reviews, boundary reviews, structural reviews, and so on. There is also a two-tier local government system, plus parish and community councils. Therefore, to compare the legislation in Northern Ireland with that of England is not to compare like with like.

There are two problems with amendment No 11. First, how can the Boundaries Commissioner reflect the interests of local communities when those interests may well be diverse or even conflicting — to which community’s interests would he or she attach most weight? Secondly, I am not sure that the delineation of ward boundaries will secure effective local government. I would have thought that it would be the new councils’ responsibility to deliver effectiveness through, as we have already heard, community planning, the power of well-being and, indeed, the other powers that are to transfer down to local government. I am sure that councillors will work hard on that.

Under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, schedule 4, Part III, paragraph 7(1), the number of electors for each ward in a district should be as equal as possible. As has already been stated, the same is not the case for districts. In that excepted piece of legislation, which rests with the Secretary of State, it is not specified that the electorate in each district must be equal. I am sure that my friends will acknowledge that that is the case.

I notice that no party or individual has sought to amend schedule 4, Part III, paragraph 7(1) of the 1972 Act. Therefore, some of the arguments that have been

made about the equal number of electors are rather vacuous.

Mr Kennedy earlier quoted from a statement that I made on 21 April, in which I said:

“There is no need to reinvent the wheel”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p297, col 2].

I am sure that he will also acknowledge the cliché “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it”. Local identity can be taken into account, and anyone can make representations on that issue to the commissioner, either in writing or in a public hearing. However, as far as I am concerned, the change that Mr Kennedy has proposed is not needed in order to allow the commissioner to take local identity into account.

Amendment No 12 seeks to require the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to have regard to the desirability of determining district and ward boundaries that are socially coherent. The fundamental difficulty is that social cohesion is not a well-defined concept, and that amendment makes no attempt to define it. Indeed, the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality said:

“I dislike the term ‘community cohesion’, frankly. I think it lacks clarity.”

We cannot ask a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to propose boundaries for wards or districts based on concepts that lack clarity. For that reason —

Mr Ford: I appreciate that social cohesion is not readily definable. Certainly, our amendments have not attempted to give it the same strength as the paragraph of the 1972 Act that the Minister quoted with reference to equal electorates. However, does the Minister agree that a ward consisting of two housing estates in Randalstown, a large stretch of open countryside and three housing estates in Antrim is not coherent in any sense?

The Minister of the Environment: I cannot make that determination, and I am surprised that the Member can do so. It is up to local representatives to raise such points with the commissioner. During the debate, it has become apparent that many Members have already decided where the boundaries lie. There was much mention of the Mountains of Mourne and other physical features, of which we will no doubt hear more from Mr Beggs when he speaks on that issue.

If local Members are going to make representations to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, I would have thought that they would have had enough confidence in their arguments to make those points.

Much has been made of the previous Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and his report. I think that Mr Farry spoke about that. I made the point this morning — or was it this afternoon? I cannot remember

when I made my last winding-up speech; it is all blurring at the edges. In the debate on the first group of amendments, I made the point that that report had a certain air of unreality about it because people knew that if devolution got up and running again, frankly —

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for giving way. I agree with her about the level of responses that came from political parties and members of the public. However, having made detailed representations on behalf of the Alliance Party and also as a local representative, and having attended several different inquiries, I can testify that the assistant commissioners and the commissioner were treating it as a genuine exercise. That is because they had to operate legally on the assumption that the seven-council model may have been implemented until a decision was made to do otherwise. The commissioners considered that to be an extremely serious exercise, not just a paper exercise.

The Minister of the Environment: I accept that. I would not have thought that the commissioner would have done otherwise. However, I am saying that had it not been for the air of unreality hanging over him, he may have received more representations than he did.

Returning to amendment No 12 and my reason as to why the Bill is better without it — it leaves unchanged the rule that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner should have regard to the desirability of determining boundaries that are readily identifiable. In other words, boundaries should be tangible and easily recognised by the population. I think that we are in agreement about that, and that is what we are trying to argue for. That should not, and cannot, be delineated in relation to abstract concepts, about which there were discussions today.

4.15 pm

Amendment No 13 is potentially even more problematic. It would mean that the commissioner could only divide a townland between districts and wards if that were in the interests of maintaining social cohesion. However, it demonstrates some confusion or misunderstanding of the prime function of the process of delineating electoral boundaries. The most important thing that the commissioner must achieve is electoral equality across each district. Put simply, that means that every vote in every ward should carry the same weight.

The importance of that is highlighted in the code of good practice in electoral matters, which has been adopted by the European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the Venice Commission. It states that the variance from the average of the electorate per division should not exceed 10%. It is possible to imagine that, in the case of a densely populated townland, there may be a reasoned case for splitting it across boards or districts so that each electoral vote

carries the same weight. Part III of schedule 4 to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 states:

“A townland shall not, except where in the opinion of the Commissioner it is unavoidable, be included partly in one district or ward and partly in another.”

However, there are circumstances in which the commissioner may feel the need to split a townland due to problems caused by boundary defacement, housing developments and patterns that are not fixed over time. Mr Weir gave an example of a golf course that was divided by townland boundaries. It might be that the only way the commissioner can resolve the boundary of a townland that has been defaced is to split it. That would not be possible if amendment No 13 were adopted. The amendment would prevent the commissioner from his or her most crucial function, and it would prevent him or her from maintaining electoral balance in the pursuit of an abstract concept, which, however laudable, would undermine the democratic credibility of the new councils. That is precisely the opposite of what we are striving to achieve.

Amendment No 15 goes further than that and builds on the same ill-defined concept of social cohesion. I have already addressed the difficulties that that causes. The amendment seeks to tie the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, in his or her considerations, to pre-empting what the District Electoral Areas Commissioner may feel is necessary in delineating district electoral areas. Amendment No 15 may be the wrong legislative vehicle as it seeks to influence the District Electoral Areas Commissioner and would, therefore, subvert the district electoral area legislation.

Mr Ford: The Minister has said previously that she is seeking to have the District Electoral Areas Commissioner appointed early to work in parallel with the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. What is the point of that being done if there is not to be interplay between them? The only logical reason for that interplay is to see that the work of one will assist the work of the other.

The Minister of the Environment: That is correct. I agree that the reason for that interplay is for one to assist the other, but it is not to predetermine the work of the other. I believe firmly that amendment No 15 would have that effect.

Mr Ford: Does the Minister appreciate that that is why the word “desirability” was used in our amendment?

The Minister of the Environment: There is no desirability for adopting amendment No 15. There is no need for the amendment; the two commissioners will work well together without the need to tie each other’s hands.

During the debate on 22 April 2008, Members suggested that there might be some benefit in trying to link the two-stage process. As I said then, I have some

sympathy with that idea, but the adoption of amendment No 15 is not the way to achieve it. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner cannot possibly be expected to draw up boundaries for wards while at the back of his or her mind considering what the District Electoral Areas Commissioner might think would be a socially cohesive district electoral area. I have told Mr Ford privately that I have already written to the Secretary of State about the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, and I hope that that process can run in tandem with that of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

Dr Farry: Does the Minister accept that amendment No 15 does not seek that the District Electoral Areas Commissioner would devise district electoral areas or would conceive of what a district electoral area would look like? Rather, the amendment seeks to ensure that, when wards are being drawn up, how a ward is plugged into a future district electoral area be borne in mind? Does the Minister appreciate that those are two separate concepts, which are subtly different from each other?

The Minister of the Environment: I accept that, but it is not the job of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to set the district electoral areas. That is the difficulty with amendment No 15.

Amendment No 14 seeks to achieve something similar to the amendments that I have discussed, but it uses slightly different terminology. Local identity and community ties are also subjective, and that point was well made by my colleague from North Down Mr Weir.

To one person, the term “community tie” might mean something entirely different than to the person next door. Such a person may attend a different church or play a different sport, either of which might be described as a community tie. To some people, local identity might be reflected in school catchment areas; to others, it might be the local shops that they use. Nevertheless, when deciding in which ward people should cast their vote, I question whether those notions are of any value.

The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner’s remit must be unambiguous, workable, practical and fair, and, I am sorry to say, the amendments do not add clarity. In fact, if anything, they muddy the waters, and anything that detracts clarity from the commissioner’s role would detract from the process’s legitimacy and the integrity of boundaries that it might produce. For that reason, I urge Members to reject the amendments.

Mr Beggs: In my opinion and, I believe, in the opinion of most reasonable people, amendment No 11 should be adopted. For local communities, it identifies several real issues that have been overlooked in the past.

As mentioned earlier, Northern Ireland suffers from outdated legislation. Updated guidance for the Local Government Commission for England, which is contained in the Local Government Act 1992, is not

yet available here, and, indeed, difficulties in securing effective and convenient local government arose because the previous Local Government Boundaries Commissioner could not take into consideration terms such as “readily identifiable”, “reflect the identities and interests of local communities” and “secure effective and convenient local government”.

Mr Kennedy said that Mr Weir and Mr Sammy Wilson highlighted the importance of local identity and social coherence, and, if they wish to be true to those words, they should support amendment No 11 and, for that matter, amendment Nos 12, 13 14 and 15. However, they now appear to be backtracking.

Mr Kennedy and Mr Ford pointed out that the previous commissioner’s report, which proposed seven super-councils, demonstrated the weaknesses of not actively applying those considerations to its determinations, and that caused errors that would have detracted from local communities and local democracy.

Mr Weir seemed to acknowledge some merit to such considerations when determining district council boundaries; however, he argued against applying them to determinations about ward-level boundaries. I fail to understand precisely why he chose to argue in such terms. He said that amendment No 11 may be unnecessary.

Mr Weir: The Member has raised two matters that relate to what I said. With regard to whether amendment No 11 is necessary or unnecessary, I qualified my remarks by stating that, if amendment No 11 were restricted purely to determining district council boundaries, there would then be a question about whether the amendment would be necessary or unnecessary.

I identified ward-level determinations because a situation could arise in which, in order to accommodate local interests, instead of a district council area comprising 150,000 voters, it might have 160,000 or 170,000 voters. Some degree of variation would be possible. A problem would arise if such flexibility were applied at ward level. If local identity were the focus, one could create a ward comprising 500 or 5,000 voters, which is a massive variation, and that is why it would be a major miscalculation to treat wards and districts in the same manner.

Mr Beggs: The Member failed to consider the opening paragraph of amendment No 11, which states: “Regard shall be had to the desirability of”.

That does not mean that those should be the only considerations; however, amendment No 11 would allow those considerations to be taken seriously by the commissioner. Mr Weir, undoubtedly, said that amendment No 11 was unnecessary, which means that it may be necessary —

Mr Weir: If the Member consults the Hansard report tomorrow, he will see that I clearly said that under no

circumstances should those considerations be applied to ward boundaries. However, if they were to be applied purely to district boundaries, amendment No 11 might, or might not, be necessary.

If there were a different amendment, the considerations might be regarded as explicit or implicit. Therefore, the Member has selectively quoted what I said to produce a different meaning, as other Members will acknowledge. The Member will see the level of distinction that I used when he reads the Hansard report tomorrow.

Mr Beggs: I said that I failed to understand the Member's reasoning for accepting the adoption of powers at a district level and not at a ward level. However, that is for him to clarify.

Mr Gallagher mentioned similar issues, such as the importance of physical identity and the importance of community in making determinations. Therefore, there is a similar line of thinking among SDLP Members as at this end of the House.

Mr Gallagher also expressed concern about the outworkings of the Sinn Féin and DUP deal. Those consequences may not be apparent now, but the difficulties will occur when the outworkings occur on the ground and pockets of areas are displaced. By then, it will be too late to make changes. My East Antrim colleague Mr Ross fails to understand that just because lots of people are not at his door asking about those issues, it does not mean that they are not important or that they should not be addressed.

Mr Ross also wanted the commissioner to make his or her own determination on boundaries. However, he failed to acknowledge that the commissioner has little leeway to give effect to his or her judgement. Again, I refer to the outworkings of the seven-super-council model, whereby only minor tweaks were made. I fail to understand how Mr Ross can say that the commissioner has been given the authority to make decisions, because there is very little flexibility.

Such matters should not be rigid in a democratic society. Identity, local communities and other matters should be taken into consideration in a professional manner. Instead, Sinn Féin and the DUP have made a deal, which will be rigidly implemented. I am disappointed that Sinn Féin and the DUP have opposed every amendment — they have not listened, which is not healthy in a democracy. Reasonable and constructive amendments have been proposed, but they have fallen on deaf ears. Perhaps, if an amendment was accepted, the back-room deal would break down and other problems would arise.

It is unfortunate that there is a lack of debate in the Assembly on certain matters. Members are being whipped by their parties, and the DUP and Sinn Féin are not allowing Members to reflect local concerns and

are not allowing a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to make adjustments that reflect the importance of boundaries to local communities.

Mr Ross: Will the Member acknowledge that the Executive made the decision on the Bill? There are two Ulster Unionist Party Ministers on the Executive — which is a democratic part of this institution — so it was up to them to make their arguments at Executive meetings.

Mr Beggs: I can count. The DUP and Sinn Féin Ministers would have overridden the Ulster Unionist Party Ministers in the Executive. The Ulster Unionist Party said that it would propose amendments. It is important in a democracy — and an Assembly — that those in a position of power listen carefully to what others say and to the constructive amendments that are tabled. A democracy should not allow half a dozen Ministers to take decisions and adopt a Stalinist approach, which I mentioned earlier, to force their parties to accept measures. All sides should be listened to in the Assembly, and reasonable comments and amendments should be accepted. That has not been the case.

4.30 pm

Mr Ford stressed that his amendments were designed to improve the process, and most reasonable people would appreciate that. He illustrated his point with the difficulties of the Tardree ward, now Shilvodan where a local townland had been separated by the M2. Mr Ford also spoke about how, in rural communities, townlands were much more relevant than roads in deciding boundaries. Sinn Féin and the DUP, again, seem to ignore that problem as shown by their failure to support amendment No 13, tabled by Mr Ford.

My colleague Ken Robinson highlighted the difficulties in Newtownabbey, where the council area is served by three Westminster constituencies. He made a good and cogent argument as to why there should be as high a degree of coterminosity as possible in Newtownabbey and other areas. However, the proposals put forward by the Minister do not reflect that, and that will result in confusion. There is a real risk that the local electorate may be put off by the confusion of having huge variations between Westminster constituencies and local government boundaries. As a result, constituents may feel that they are not well served. It would be much better if people understood that they were being served in the same geographical area, rather than having to be represented by three Westminster MPs and one council.

The Ulster Unionist Party was led to believe that the Minister of the Environment would be open to reasonable and constructive amendments. Therefore it is disappointing that all amendments, thus far, have been rejected.

Mr Kennedy indicated how out of date our boundary legislation is at present. That was used by the Minister

in some of her remarks as a way of rejecting his tabled amendment because of some difficulties elsewhere. However, I am sure that many other areas have realised benefits from the more updated English legislation and guidance.

There was criticism of the Ulster Unionist Party for simply adopting wording used elsewhere. I would have thought that this would have the effect of simplifying legislation in the UK and as a result Northern Ireland legislation would have fitted in better with other UK legislation. The amendment should have been more acceptable to the Minister.

The Minister, however, does not seem to want to have any subjective decisions made. Both the DUP and Sinn Féin seem to want their deal, and the boundaries, to be cut and dried. They would supplement this with a few minor tweaks that a commissioner may determine, to be thrust upon the community irrespective of what failings may result. I am disappointed with that approach.

Others have argued that “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it”. However, if we can see difficulties coming down the line should we not try to make improvements? That would avoid faults arising in the future. Again, I am disappointed with that lack of openness and flexibility.

It is a sad day for this Assembly when the two major parties do not listen to sensible, reasoned amendments made by other parties. Instead, they try to ramrod through their proposals, having carefully carved up Northern Ireland to suit their own narrow self-interest.

I support amendment No 11, in particular, and will also support amendment Nos 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Amendment No 11 proposed: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() for paragraph 14 substitute—

“14. Regard shall be had to the desirability of determining district and ward boundaries which—

(a) are readily identifiable;

(b) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and

(c) secure effective and convenient local government.” - [*Mr Kennedy.*]

Question put, That amendment No 11 be made.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that the Noes have it.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On the collection of voices, it was clear in this part of the Chamber that this matter is worth a Lobby vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker sits in this part of the House, where it was eminently clear that the Noes had it.

Mr Ford: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. My understanding of Standing Orders is that a challenge to the provisional opinion of the Chair

results, and has always resulted, in a Division through the Lobbies — including on at least one occasion, when, if I may gently remind you, Mr Deputy Speaker, you assessed the voices wrongly.

Therefore, based on the precedent that was established by you and your colleagues and the Speaker, and given that there was a challenge to your statement that you believed that the Noes had it, you should have granted a Division.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you for that point of order, Mr Ford. I have made my decision.

Mr Ford: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, will you advise Members under what circumstances you would rule that a Division be granted, given that, on all previous occasions, a Division has been granted on the basis of a challenge to the opinion given from the Chair?

It appears that you are creating new rules for the Assembly, and I think that you have a duty to explain those rules.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is the duty of the Speaker or Deputy Speaker to make a judgement on the collection of voices. The judgement that I made was that the Noes quite clearly had it. I made my judgement fairly and squarely on that basis. If a Division had been called, I firmly believe that the result would not have been any different.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Surely it is complete nonsense to suggest that this House is run in the way that was suggested by Mr Ford. If that were the case, the Speaker would have no authority. The Speaker, or, in this case, the Deputy Speaker, has authority, and has used it properly. The Speaker’s past and present authority cannot be bowed by a challenge such as the one that was made by the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 12 has —

Mr Ford: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe that the Assembly follows parliamentary precedent. On a previous occasion, when a ruling of the Speaker was challenged and a Division was granted, the Finance Minister told me during the Division that, in another place — in Westminster — he and the honourable Member for North Antrim had divided the House of Commons when they were the only two voices of dissent. It appears to me that that would be a rather useful precedent for you to take on board.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Ford, this is not another place. This is this place, and I have taken a collection of voices and it was quite clear at this end of the Chamber that the Noes had it. That is my decision and I am continuing with further business.

Mr Ford: Further to the point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, are you now making a clear ruling that precedents established in the House of Commons, which have so far been taken to apply in this place, no longer apply here — that, in effect, you are tearing up Erskine May, as from this afternoon?

Mrs I Robinson: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, is Mr Ford aware that, in another place, if I had used the term “misleading”, I would not have been put out of the Building?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I take Mr Ford’s point of order regarding precedent. There is precedent in the Assembly when the Speaker’s decision has been challenged on a number of occasions. I believe that Mr Ford has made three challenges — I will check the Hansard report. The Division is called.

Question put, That amendment No 11 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 29; Noes 50.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGlone, Mr O’Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Kennedy and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Robinson and Mr Ross.

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment No 12 proposed: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 14 insert—

‘and socially coherent’.” — [Mr Ford.]

Amendment No 12 negated.

Amendment No 13 proposed: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() for paragraph 15 substitute—

‘15. A townland shall not, except where in the opinion of the Commissioner it is unavoidable in the interests of maintaining social cohesion, be included partly in one district or ward and partly in another.’” — [Mr Ford.]

Amendment No 13 negated.

Amendment No 14 proposed: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 16 add—

‘(16A) The Commissioner shall make recommendations on the number and boundaries of districts having regard to the size, population and physical diversity of Northern Ireland, local identity and community ties and the representation of the rural and urban electorate.’” — [Mr Gallagher]

Amendment No 14 negated.

Amendment No 15 proposed: In clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert

“() at end of paragraph 17 add—

‘; and

(c) the desirability that wards may be easily grouped into readily identifiable and socially coherent district electoral areas.’” — [Mr Ford.]

Amendment No 15 negated.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 16 is dependent on amendment No 1. As amendment No 1 has not been made, I will not call amendment No 16.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Long title

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 17 is dependent on amendment No 1. As amendment No 1 has not been made, I will not call amendment No 17.

Amendment No 18 is dependent on amendment No 2. As amendment No 2 has not been made, I will not call amendment No 18.

Question put, That the long title be agreed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The ayes have it.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I suggest that the vote was closer than you have indicated.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your advice Mr Kennedy.

Question put, That the long title be agreed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The ayes have it.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. From this perspective, it seemed that the

votes were balanced. I respectfully suggest that the House should divide.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I shall bow to your superior knowledge, Mr McCrea, and I shall put the question again.

Question put, That the long title be agreed.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 48; Noes 29.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr G Robinson and Mr Ross.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Dr Farry and Mr Kennedy.

Long title accordingly agreed to.

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

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Standing Orders

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the next four motions relating to amendments to Standing Orders are connected, I propose to conduct only one debate as follows.

I shall ask the Clerk to read the first motion, and will then call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures, who shall move that motion. The debate that will then take place will encompass all the motions. When all who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on the first motion.

Subject to that motion's being carried, I shall then ask the Clerk to read the second motion into the record and ask the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move it. I will then put the Question on the second motion without further debate. I shall continue this process until all the motions have been read into the record, moved and voted on. If that is clear, we will proceed.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow): I beg to move

After Standing Order 23 insert:

"23A MATTERS OF THE DAY

(1) A Member may seek leave of the Speaker to make a statement to the Assembly on a matter which fulfils the criteria specified in paragraph (2) by making a formal request not later than the time provided for in paragraph (3), which formal request shall outline the subject matter of the proposed statement.

(2) In deciding whether to grant leave to a Member who has made a formal request under paragraph (1) the Speaker shall take account of the following criteria –

(a) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which has occurred and has come to public attention since the Assembly last stood adjourned;

(b) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which is of exceptional public interest;

(c) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which directly affects the people of Northern Ireland;

(d) that the specific subject matter of the proposed statement is not, and has not previously been, the subject of or directly related to a statement, application, notice or referral made or given under this or any other Standing Order.

(3) Any request under this Standing Order shall be made not later than–

(a) 9.30 am on any sitting day; or

(b) if the Speaker is satisfied that the event or incident to which the formal request relates came to the attention of the Member at such time that the Member could not reasonably have made a formal request by the time stipulated in sub-paragraph (a), such later time as the Speaker may direct.

(4) As soon as possible after receipt of a formal request under this Standing Order the Speaker shall decide whether to give a Member who has made the formal request under this Standing Order leave to make a statement, and shall forthwith notify the Member of that decision. If the Speaker gives leave for a statement to be made he/she shall allow the Member (together with such other Members as the Speaker may select) to make the statement as soon as reasonably practicable.

(5) No Member may intervene during a Member's statement under this Standing Order and there will be no questions and no vote will be taken at the conclusion of the statement or statements."

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

In Standing Order 10(1), after sub-paragraph (h) insert new sub-paragraph

"(i) Matters of the day." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*]

In Standing Order 68(1), after sub-paragraph (c) insert new sub-paragraph

"(d) in any statement made pursuant to Standing Order 23A," — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*]

In Standing Order 68(2), after sub-paragraph (c) insert new sub-paragraph

"(d) in any statement made pursuant to Standing Order 23A," — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*]

As Members will be aware, there have been a number of terrible incidents in Northern Ireland in the last few months, such as the building collapse in Victoria Street in Belfast on 10 March and the house fire in Omagh on 13 November 2007. There has also been an attempt to murder a policeman in Dungannon, and a similar attempt to murder a policeman in Londonderry.

These are but a few of the things that Members may have wished to speak on but, unfortunately, there has previously been no Standing Order provision to permit that.

The Assembly has no official way in which to recognise such events. Instead, Members have been reduced to making comments at the beginning or end of other speeches. That method of addressing or recognising such incidents is inadequate. It appears to the electorate — those whom we represent — that the Assembly is removed from such incidents. When considering the issue, Members of the Committee on Procedures said that it appeared that the Assembly was cold or indifferent to events that capture the attention of the people of Northern Ireland.

5.15 pm

The Committee has been examining the issue over the past few months, and its overwhelming concern has been to provide a dignified procedure that allows the voice of the Assembly to be heard on such occasions.

On behalf of the Committee, I present a new Standing Order to the Assembly for its approval. The purpose of the Standing Order is to afford Members an opportunity,

in a plenary session, to comment on an event or incident of significant public importance or interest — for instance a civic emergency such as flooding — or an event that results in substantial loss of life or which is worth celebrating. I emphasise the word "significant"; the Committee does not envisage that the Standing Order will be used regularly. It was designed for significant events of a happy or a tragic nature.

Although the Speaker will be the judge of what may be accepted, the Committee does not foresee that a local sporting club that wins a local trophy, for instance, will be a matter of the day. It is not the intention of the Committee that matters of the day become the Assembly's equivalent of the local news. That would rob important events of the gravitas that they deserve.

A request to raise a matter of the day must go to the Speaker, and it will be allowed at his discretion, subject to criteria that are detailed in the Standing Order. This is a new procedure that has no counterpart in any other legislature that the Committee looked at. As such, its operations will, to an extent, evolve over time. To that end, the Committee is content to leave its operation in the capable hands of the Speaker and his rulings.

If the new provision is approved by the Assembly, the Committee recommends that guidance on its implementation should be issued to reflect the Speaker's ruling on its operation and to make it clear that it will be subject to the provisions of the Standing Order.

The proposed Standing Order is clear on several points, such as timing. It has been written to allow for new events; it is not anticipated that Members will be able to go back in history to present matters that are weeks, months or years old. However, allowance has been made for events that happen during recess.

Ideally, matters of the day will be taken immediately after prayers, but the Committee recognised that that will not always be possible. Depending on when an event happens, arrangements must be made for matters of the day to be taken as soon as is practically possible after the event. Such practical arrangements will be in the hands of the Speaker and will depend on and vary according to the type of incident and when it occurs.

It is also clear that the proposed Standing Order cannot be used by Members to raise a matter that was discussed under another Assembly procedure or for matters that are better suited to Assembly procedures such as Question Time. That stipulation has been added to maintain the dignity and gravity that is necessary for matters of the day.

Some consequential amendments arise from the proposed Standing Order. Standing Order 10(1) includes a list of categories of business to be conducted in the Assembly, and "Matters of the Day" will be added to that list. Sub-paragraphs will also be added to Standing Orders 68(1) and 68(2) to ensure that Members'

matters of the day are covered by Standing Order 68 “Sub Judge”.

As part of its annual editorial reprint of Standing Orders during the summer, the Committee will — as a matter of course — renumber the new Standing Order as Standing Order 28 and renumber every Standing Order thereafter.

I commend the new Standing Order to the Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no other Member has indicated a request to speak, I will put the question. Before we proceed to the question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 23 insert:

“23A MATTERS OF THE DAY

(1) A Member may seek leave of the Speaker to make a statement to the Assembly on a matter which fulfils the criteria specified in paragraph (2) by making a formal request not later than the time provided for in paragraph (3), which formal request shall outline the subject matter of the proposed statement.

(2) In deciding whether to grant leave to a Member who has made a formal request under paragraph (1) the Speaker shall take account of the following criteria –

(a) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which has occurred and has come to public attention since the Assembly last stood adjourned;

(b) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which is of exceptional public interest;

(c) whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which directly affects the people of Northern Ireland;

(d) that the specific subject matter of the proposed statement is not, and has not previously been, the subject of or directly related to a statement, application, notice or referral made or given under this or any other Standing Order.

(3) Any request under this Standing Order shall be made not later than—

(a) 9.30 am on any sitting day; or

(b) if the Speaker is satisfied that the event or incident to which the formal request relates came to the attention of the Member at such time that the Member could not reasonably have made a formal request by the time stipulated in sub-paragraph (a), such later time as the Speaker may direct.

(4) As soon as possible after receipt of a formal request under this Standing Order the Speaker shall decide whether to give a Member who has made the formal request under this Standing Order leave to make a statement, and shall forthwith notify the Member of that decision. If the Speaker gives leave for a statement to be made he/she shall allow the Member (together with such other Members as the Speaker may select) to make the statement as soon as reasonably practicable.

(5) No Member may intervene during a Member’s statement under this Standing Order and there will be no questions and no vote will be taken at the conclusion of the statement or statements.”

Amendment made: In Standing Order 10(1), after sub-paragraph (h) insert new sub-paragraph

“(i) Matters of the day.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

Amendment made: In Standing Order 68(1), after sub-paragraph (c) insert new sub-paragraph

“(d) in any statement made pursuant to Standing Order 23A,”. — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

Amendment made: In Standing Order 68(2), after sub-paragraph (c) insert new sub-paragraph

“(d) in any statement made pursuant to Standing Order 23A,”. — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes to do so.

Mrs O'Neill: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern about the lack of access to Health Service dental treatment across all Health Board areas; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to urgently bring forward an action plan to address the problem.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin is committed to creating a society where inequalities in health are eradicated, and everyone has equal access to the highest-quality healthcare services, which are provided on the basis of need. We believe that healthcare is a right and should be free at the point of delivery, and that includes access to dental services.

The backdrop to the motion will be clear to many Members — a similar motion was debated in July 2007, and all Members expressed concerns about the issue of access to Health Service dentists. During that debate, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety stated that he was committed to dealing with the problems that were highlighted, and he informed us about the primary dental care strategy and the changes in the commissioning process that could lead to an increase in the availability of dentists. Despite that, almost one year later, we find ourselves in a situation that has not improved.

We welcomed the additional moneys that the Minister made available towards the end of 2007, but despite that additional funding, the oral-health strategy and the primary dental care strategy, we, as MLAs working in our constituencies, do not see a difference. We do not see the changes in the front-line service. The current situation is that we have the worst oral health when compared with England, Scotland, Wales or the Twenty-six Counties. The level of tooth decay among 12-year-olds here is more than double that found in England, Scotland, Wales and the Twenty-six Counties.

In spite of that situation, people here still do not have full, equal access to Health Service dentists. I am sure that every MLA has been contacted by constituents who cannot access a Health Service dentist in their area. I represent Mid Ulster, which is a rural constituency, and I believe that the challenge is even greater in rural areas because, although access to dental services may have been sparse in the past, the situation has now become dire. Some people are unable to access a dentist at all; some are able to access a dentist only after a long

wait; some are able to access a dentist only if they travel great distances, and then they also incur additional financial hardship.

If they cannot afford the additional finances, their oral health suffers. That situation is unacceptable, and we have a duty to our constituents to ensure that we work to remedy it.

Dentists have a crucial role to play in patient education and in the promotion of good oral health. For example, the majority of mouth cancers are detected by dentists during routine patient examinations. Oral-health promotion and preventative dental care require adequate time for dentists to spend with their patients. However, more than two thirds of dentists believe that they are unable to spend sufficient time with individual patients to enable them to take a more preventative approach to care. Dentists want to provide modern preventative care to patients, and to do so, they require properly funded dental services.

Funding for Health Service practices is derived from two sources: the fees that the dentists earn for providing treatment, and the allowances that are payable to dentists. From those allowances, dentists then have to meet their overheads such as staff costs, premises, and so on. Fees paid to dentists have not kept pace with increases in expenses over the years, which has led to a system that penalises dentists who were committed to the Health Service.

A survey of dental practitioners that was conducted in December 2007 found that poor Health Service fees and a general lack of funding was considered the biggest threat to the viability of dental practices.

The primary dental care strategy that was published in November 2006 set out a 10-year plan for the Health Service's primary dental-care services. The strategy was developed with the local commissioning of services in mind. Under the proposed arrangements, commissioners will be responsible for securing primary dental-care services. Those services will be obtained from general dental practitioners, the community dental service and salaried staff, or a mixture of all three.

To ensure an equal spread of dentists across all locations and a fully accessible dental service, dentists need to be viewed as part of the new commissioning structures. That is the key to progress on the issue. Core to that is that everyone, regardless of postcode, should have full access to dental services on the basis of equality.

I am sure that, when the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety contributes to the debate, he will talk about the problems of retention and recruitment. I accept that, but I accept it as a challenge that the Minister has to meet. The recruitment and retention of dentists to the Health Service depends on

the service being an attractive environment in which patients can receive high-quality dental care.

It is simply not good enough to say that the Health Service cannot compete with market forces. The Health Service has to compete in order to provide equitable services across the North. It is time for the Minister to become more inventive. We want to see an action plan that will clearly set out how he will address what can be described only as an absolute disgrace and as a failure on the part of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide high-quality care that is safe and effective.

As for retention and recruitment, it is not only experienced dentists that we are losing from the NHS each year. What incentive is the Minister providing to newly qualified dental graduates? Each year in the North, we aim to produce 40 new graduates. On graduation, those individuals require places in training practices to begin their careers. However, in the past two years, that target of 40 new training places has not been achieved: there were only 30 places in 2007, and 32 places in 2008. That forces graduates to seek their training elsewhere.

I am aware that dental students are the most expensive to train, with costs running at perhaps double what it costs to train a doctor. However, what return do we get from that investment? The investment is substantial and we should expect to retain the service of dentists that we train. I call on the Minister to outline during his contribution what efforts he has made to address that issue.

The issues are clear. We want more effort to retain and recruit Health Service dentists, and we want to see more community dental services that will be responsive to local need. Furthermore, we want equality of service, and we want an action plan to deal with those issues. There is currently no fair deal when it comes to accessing Health Service dentists. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs I Robinson): I welcome the opportunity to speak during the debate on behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and to give the motion the full backing of the Committee. I am pleased that the motion has been tabled by members of the Committee, and I note that the previous motion on this topic — which has already been mentioned — which was debated on 2 July 2007, was also tabled by members of the Committee.

Access to NHS dental treatment in Northern Ireland has been identified by the British Dental Association as being at an acute level. Despite assurances from the Minister that he is addressing the problem, it has not yet been resolved. That is why we find ourselves here, calling for urgent action.

5.30 pm

In a letter to the Health Committee on 21 February 2008, the Minister said that 800 general dentist practitioners were on the dental list. In evidence to the Committee on 6 March 2008, he said:

“Northern Ireland is well provided with dentists per head of population — we have 48 dentists per 100,000 people...Our problem is that dentists are drifting from the Health Service to the private sector, and that needs to be addressed.”

I could not agree more.

The reason for the drift from the Health Service to the private sector is because dentists are no longer sufficiently resourced by the Department and are unable to provide the service that the public requires.

The Minister quoted high figures in relation to practitioners. However, the number of dental practices has dropped from 362 in 2004 to 349 currently. While the number of dentists has risen by 34% in the last 10 years, the lack of resourcing into the infrastructure of dental services has markedly restricted service delivery. Furthermore, fees that dentists earn for providing treatment for NHS patients and allowances that are payable to dentists have not kept pace with increasing expenses. Dental practitioners in Northern Ireland have reported that poor NHS fees and a general lack of funding were considered to be the foremost threat to the viability of practices.

A significant part of the accessibility problem is reflected in the training regime for dental students, specifically dental practice placements. This year in Northern Ireland, 38 final-year students are looking for vocational training placements. There are only 32 dental training posts, although the Minister has provided funding for 40 training posts. This year, around 60 students are competing for those 32 places.

Many dental students are forced to look for training placements outside Northern Ireland, and there are more attractive options for dental graduates elsewhere. We are losing valuable expertise to what has often been described as the brain drain. Perhaps that is where we have much to learn from the Scottish model. An undergraduate dental student there receives £4,000 per year for each year of training. When the student qualifies, there is a range of incentives offered to graduate dentists to remain in Scotland, providing services to the NHS, and specifically to serve the outlying areas of Scotland; the Highlands and islands, where the need for dental services is the greatest.

If we were to resource our dental students in a similar way, we might go some way to meeting the urgent need of access to dental services in Northern Ireland, particularly in those areas where there is such poor access to dental services, such as in the west of the Province. I am sure that we will hear more in this debate about how the Western Health and Social

Services Board has been seeking to recruit six salaried dentists but has not managed to recruit any as yet.

As in Scotland, if dental students choose to practise elsewhere, there could be appropriate buy-out clauses in such a scheme. With the historic underfunding, and growing demands on the profession, £500,000 for training allowances is insufficient funding to allow dentists to provide training facilities for new practitioners. It costs approximately £30,000 for a new surgery — that is before one can begin to take into account the running costs of that surgery, for example, the salary of a dental nurse or the training time of a senior practitioner.

To meet the costs of training dental trainers, dental training, by nature, is conducted on a one-to-one basis and is implicitly expensive. The Minister said that it costs approximately £175,000 to train each dentist and to meet all the new legislative regulations, including the installation of decontamination rooms that are required to service dental equipment.

I support the British Dental Association recommendation that the Department should consider investing in the future dental workforce through a bursary scheme for undergraduates. The Department should further explore means whereby new practitioners service the areas of high need through an incentive scheme, as in the Scottish model. I support the motion.

Mr McCallister: It is a regrettable reality that in Northern Ireland, and throughout the United Kingdom, significant numbers of people struggle to gain access to regular dental treatment.

Dental treatment is of paramount importance to everyone in society. The quality of people's teeth can dictate the quality of their lives. In her opening remarks, Mrs O'Neill made a very important point about the number of cases of mouth cancer that are detected by dentists. It is vital that as many people as possible get access to a good dental service.

To ensure good dental health, and good general health, people must be able to visit a dentist whenever they need to. Northern Ireland's dental health is poor in comparison to the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and that is why we must ensure that entitlement to Health Service dental care remains universal and as cheap as possible in the Health Service. Exempt patient groupings should continue to receive free treatment.

Preventative care is crucial for the future of dental health in Northern Ireland. There is a clear consensus in the Assembly that we have problems in our dental service that must be overcome. We have a problem recruiting and retaining dentists in the Health Service in Northern Ireland, and we need to improve access to dentists for all our local communities.

We should also recognise that Northern Ireland is not alone in facing such problems. A recent report highlighted that more than 23 million people received no dental care on the NHS in the two years up to September 2007. As far back as 2004, researchers at the University of Bath highlighted the fact that the NHS needed to recruit an extra 5,200 dentists. It is obvious that Northern Ireland and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety are not alone. For decades, underfunding and an antiquated policy have stripped Health Service dental practices of an ability to provide a cutting-edge service. The current Health Minister has inherited those problems, which have been building for years and, perhaps, even decades. Current issues cannot be overcome overnight, and Members should recognise that.

In previous years under direct rule, malfunctioning services would have gone on without any Government accountability. Under a devolved Administration, however, we have a Minister to answer our questions, and I am grateful for his attendance and look forward to his response.

The current Health Minister has delivered substantially for the people of Northern Ireland. In a heated debate, the Minister, by refusing to accept the draft Budget, won extra investment for health and social care services. Equally, he has delivered an extra £50 million investment in the Ambulance Service and the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I wish to correct what Mr McCallister said. The Minister indicated that he did not sign off the draft Budget, and that was what was in question. He had denied that he had signed off. I want to put that on record.

Mr McCallister: The Minister was after more money, and he got more money — despite the opposition from the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

A Member: Shame.

Mr McCallister: It was shameful at the time. The very person who should have been championing the Health Service was opposed to it.

The Minister has made substantial improvements to waiting times, and he has frozen prescription charges. Those are clear and significant achievements. The Assembly should recognise that we have a very proactive Minister.

In the light of our current problems, I warmly welcomed the Minister's announcement last year of a £4.4 million boost to the Health Service, of which £0.2 million was recurrent. That was a substantial percentage increase in funding for the Health Service. A significant amount of that allocation was set aside to

help ensure an adequate supply of new young dentists into Health Service dentistry and to boost vocational training, both of which are key issues in the debate. Money was also set aside to increase equality of access.

While it is recognised that more must be done, and we still have serious problems, it should be recognised that we are in a very different climate. The Minister can be held to account by Members in the Assembly, and he is proving that he is capable of responding to the major issues that face our health and social services.

I welcome and look forward to the Minister's response. I support the motion.

Mrs Hanna: I thank those who moved the motion. As has already been said, my colleague Tommy Gallagher and I previously brought a similar motion to the Floor, but unfortunately the situation has not improved for people trying to access dental services. It has already been stated that Northern Ireland has the worst levels of oral health when compared to the UK and Republic of Ireland, and we know that poor oral health has a negative impact on people's general health and well-being.

Dental health is an integral part of the National Health Service, but over the years we have seen that function being privatised by stealth. That is unacceptable because, like medical treatment, it should be free at the point of use, on the basis of need. The British Dental Association (BDA) says that, unlike GPs — who get 90% of their surgery costs reimbursed from the public purse — dental surgeries have to pay their running costs for premises, equipment, staff, professional insurance and the like, and that the reimbursement they receive from the NHS is not sufficient to cover those costs, which is why more and more dentists are opting for private practice. However, dentists are not private professional businesses, like, for example, an accountancy or legal practice. When people go to a chartered accountant or solicitor they go on a wholly fee-paying basis, with no public subsidy. Dentistry is not like that. It provides an essential public health service, and those who provide it need to be reimbursed fairly, but not exorbitantly.

I need to know the situation. What are the facts and figures? There are almost 800 dentists in Northern Ireland: what are they earning? Have reimbursement fees kept pace with inflation? Can those practices that opt for 100% NHS work be reimbursed on the same basis as GPs? We are told that the application of £7.9 million to dentistry in the 2007-08 budgetary year did little to address the problems of access, and that the funding was diverted into practice allowance, meeting the cost of compliance with infection control procedures, establishing salaried dentists and supporting the training of dental graduates. The BDA has stated that the recruitment of salaried dentists has been unsuccessful.

What is the reason for that? What is the salary scale? Could it be simply that dentists can earn far more in private practice?

Northern Ireland has roughly the same number of dentists as any other part of the UK. Around 40 new dentists graduate from Queen's University each year — although there were slightly fewer last year. It costs more to train a dentist than a doctor, which is a huge investment by the taxpayer. Do dentists have an obligation to pay back some of the money spent on their training? I do not know, but it is a question that needs to be asked. Has the delivery of dentistry services been privatised? Do we need to increase the intake of dental students? Could some be trained at Magee College, in order to deal with the very bad situation west of the Bann?

Dentists complain bitterly about the grindingly — I am sorry about the pun — mundane nature of National Health Service work, sometimes referred to as “drill and fill”, asserting that it is not only unremunerative, but professionally unrewarding. Could dental hygienists, dental nurses and auxiliary services work with the professional dentists in a broader teamwork approach? I understand that the Minister and his Department are putting a contract in place, but that must be a contract that puts the patient and clients first, that provides timely service, free at the point of need, for those who are entitled and on benefits. Very importantly, if some people have to pay, it must be affordable. Currently, that is not the case, especially for people who are just above the benefits threshold — the very people who struggle to pay for everything.

When someone breaks a tooth, or has an excruciating toothache, there has to be an available dentist. Although the dental hospital is available for emergencies and more complex work, there is really just a skeleton arrangement of pain clinics. That is just not a long-term solution, and I ask the Minister to address those issues.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome this very important debate, and thank Cárál Ní Chuilín, Michelle O'Neill and Sue Ramsey for bringing it to the House. I, like every other Member, am asked on an almost daily basis by constituents to do something in the Assembly to make regular visits to the dentist much simpler and more affordable.

5.45 pm

It has been recognised that the poor dental provision in Northern Ireland does not meet the needs of the community and results in a low standard of oral health. I am glad to see that Minister Michael McGimpsey is in the Chamber to hear elected representatives present the case, on behalf of our community, for a much better dental service that should be easily accessible to everyone.

The inadequate and antiquated contracting system within which dentists work is one reason that people experience difficulties when they want to visit the dentist. I recognise that dentists must pay bills for their premises, equipment, staff, and so forth, but the Government must provide the necessary funding to ensure that everyone, not only those with cash, can receive a good dental service when required.

I acknowledge that the Minister secured extra funding in September 2007. However, he recognised that it was not enough to stop dentists leaving the Health Service and going into private practice. Clearly, not enough has been done, and I appeal to the Minister to heed what Members have said today. I ask him also to listen to the BDA, which is best placed to know that its members are still inclined to move away from the NHS, thereby depriving our constituents of the basic dental service to which they are entitled.

Now that there is a local Administration at Stormont, Members' constituents want, need and expect it to deliver the services of local dentists to them and their children. The Assembly must encourage people to look after their oral health, and the duty of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is to ensure that there are no obstacles in the way of anyone who wants to access a dentist.

The training of dentists in Northern Ireland was mentioned, and the Department must ensure that new dentists are encouraged, by whatever means, to stay in Northern Ireland and provide a good dental service.

MLAs were elected to the Assembly to provide people with the basic necessities to enable them to have decent lives, and those basic necessities include the service of a dentist when needed. People are not terribly interested in how the Government contract out dentists; they simply want to be able to see a dentist when necessary.

I support the BDA's request that dentists be represented on the new local commissioning groups. I am unsure whether that has happened, and perhaps the Minister will enlighten the Assembly on that. I support the motion, and I expect the Minister to deliver a good dental service for the community as soon as possible.

Mr Buchanan: The executive summary of the primary dental-care strategy that was published in September 2006 contained the damning statistic that Northern Ireland has the worst oral health in the UK. It highlighted the need for equitable access to dental services, which should be located across Northern Ireland to enable those who are less affluent and people with disabilities, who may rely on public transport, to receive care within a reasonable period of time.

However, two years after the publication of the report, which listed many recommendations and set many targets, the situation is so much worse that in

some areas it is practically impossible to access an NHS dental practice.

As was mentioned earlier, the west of the Province has a shortage of dentists, but despite a recruitment drive by the Western Health and Social Services Board, not one of the six posts has been filled. A few weeks ago, a constituent from Trillick in west Tyrone went on radio to highlight how it was impossible to access an NHS practice — one simply could not be found. That is because all the dentists are walking away from the NHS and entering private practice.

Those constituents are angry and frustrated; they feel let down and discriminated against by the Department of Health and by the Minister of Health, who is responsible for rectifying the disparity in rural areas. His cheerleader John McCallister likes to blame everything on the past — and on the other Departments; however, it is the Minister who has failed on this occasion. Of course, it is nothing new to the people of West Tyrone to be on the receiving end —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: No, you will have your chance.

It is nothing new to the people of West Tyrone to be on the receiving end of inequality in healthcare provision. If this trend is allowed to continue, NHS dental practices will soon be extinct, especially in rural areas where they will be a thing of the past. I challenge the Minister to tell the House whether he will allow this to happen on his watch or whether he will do something about it. Why is this happening, why are more dental practices going private, and what is wrong with the new NHS system? The answer is simple and twofold: first, the service is underfunded; secondly, it is unattractive. Many dentists have left the NHS, and many of those who remain are considering walking away because they find it difficult to make their businesses viable and because they must deal with the bureaucracy that surrounds accessing money from the NHS.

The affordability of dental practice infrastructure in the Health Service is a significant issue. Dentists cannot afford to locate, renovate and equip premises to provide dental care with the funding that they receive from the Health Service. Although NHS dentists receive a fee for the treatment that they provide and an annual allowance, they still have to meet the practice costs, which include premises, equipment and staff. The result is that experienced dentists and newly qualified graduates are being lost to the Health Service.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: I know the Minister, and his response will —

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: You had your chance. I know the Minister, and his response will probably seek to highlight measures that he has taken to address this matter. However, like other Members, I remind him that that is not working because we do not have dentists in rural areas. West Tyrone is a prime example. As the motion states, we urgently require an action plan to address this matter.

The time for fine words and fair speeches is over. We want action, and we want the Minister to deliver. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: When Members indicate that they do not wish to give way, one should not persist.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Carál Ní Chuilín, Michelle O'Neill and Sue Ramsey for tabling the motion. The Stand up for Derry campaign has made improved health provision one of its central demands, and I would like the Health Minister to support the campaign on this issue.

I support the motion and want to draw attention to the situation in Derry, which is nothing short of a crisis. Not one dentist in Derry is accepting new NHS patients. Indeed, in the whole north-west, the only practice that accepts new NHS patients who are not on benefits is in Dungiven. All other dental practices in Derry, Strabane and Limavady have closed their doors to new NHS patients on benefits and are seeing new patients on a private basis only. One can get dental treatment in Derry — but only if one pays for it. That has placed an intolerable burden on many low-income families, who are being forced to take out loans in order to pay for essential dental treatment. Others are forced to suffer excruciating pain because they cannot afford to pay.

It is abundantly clear that the oral-health strategy for the north-west is not working. The Health Minister needs a strategy to attract dentists into the NHS so that something can be done, especially for people in the north-west.

Reports have shown that we have the worst level of oral health among children in Europe. That situation will not change unless drastic action is taken to get more NHS dentists in places such as Derry. As has already been mentioned, dentists leave the NHS all the time in favour of private practice. Therefore, a way must be found to keep them in the system.

The Western Health and Social Services Board recently advertised for six new Health Service dentists after receiving funding from the Health Department. It interviewed dentists for the posts in January, but it has not been able to make any appointments. It is, therefore, obvious that the Department must look seriously at how it intends to attract new dentists into the NHS.

Will the Minister consider funding existing dentists in the city in order to allow them to carry out NHS work one day each week, for example? Sinn Féin has met with several dentists in Derry who say that they are prepared to offer that service if the necessary funding is provided. There is no doubt that immediate intervention is required. That has been evident in the remarks of all Members who have contributed to the debate. Such intervention is essential if the problem is to be dealt with. Like other Members, I urge the Minister to introduce an action plan as soon as possible. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Easton: Many people enjoy good health, and their visits to medical practitioners may be few and far between. However, that is not always the case when it comes to their oral health and dental treatment. Most people agree that both emergency and regular access to dental treatment from dentists and supporting professional services are a necessity that should be available universally to the entire community on an equitable basis.

Northern Ireland's population has the worst oral health in the United Kingdom. The average household in Northern Ireland spends more money on cigarettes, confectionery and sugared soft drinks than any other region in the UK. Northern Ireland also has to face the additional problem that it is the most deprived part of the United Kingdom. Research shows that we are inclined to eat fewer fruits and vegetables and brush our teeth less frequently. Deprived and materially disadvantaged people in the community are at greater risk, and they are the people who attend dental surgeries least often. Such matters require a considered response. The Assembly must pressurise the big drinks' producers to develop a more responsible attitude to their products.

In spite of that, the Province's dentist-to-population ratio is favourable to that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Sound oral-health strategies that target the young are in place. They are an important means of moving resources away from the treatment of disease and emphasising the importance of prevention. It is vital that there is equitable provision of, and access to, Health Service dental treatment across all board areas. Sadly, that is not the case. In the new Northern Ireland that it seeks to create, the Assembly must ensure that where people live, how much they earn, or their age should not determine the health- and dental-services that they receive.

I am aware that much work has already been done to analyse the situation and to determine the challenges that are faced. The situation is far from satisfactory. The primary dental-care strategy and the oral-health strategy for Northern Ireland, which were introduced in November 2006 and June 2007 respectively, are to

be welcomed, along with applications for additional finance to tackle the most urgent problems.

Dentists, like any other professionals, are free to make decisions. One cannot blame them if they prefer to do private work. In such work, they earn more money, and the higher rates that they charge enable them to spend more time with patients and to do a better and, perhaps, more satisfying job. Health Service practitioners say that current rates prevent them from spending as much time as they would like with individual patients. They are under pressure because so many people need to be seen. Often, those dentists cannot devote the attention that they would like to specific patients. The outcome is that private practice is increasingly attractive for dental practitioners, but it is reducing the availability of inexpensive dental treatment for a considerable number of people in Northern Ireland. Of course, the people who suffer are those who live in disadvantaged or in rural areas, which have smaller populations.

The Assembly must make it more attractive for dentists to carry out Health Service work. Perhaps those dentists, who receive many years' training at the expense of the public purse, should be contracted to treat a proportion of Health Service patients for a set period of years after they qualify.

6.00 pm

The differential access to treatment across various health and social services board areas is a matter of serious concern. We urgently need an action plan that addresses that problem.

I want to address some of the points that the Member for South Down John McCallister made. He forgot to mention that it was the Minister of Finance and Personnel who found the extra money for the health budget, not the Minister of Health, Services and Public Safety. He would do well to remember that.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, I will not. While Mr McCallister was still in nappies, the Member for Strangford Iris Robinson was, for many years, fighting to secure funding for the Health Service and good causes in that sector. She has achieved a lot more than he ever will. If the Ulster Unionists took the health mandate seriously, they would turn up to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, but they do not bother. Whenever they do attend, they come in late and go home early.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: If they wish, they can check the records in the Business Office. I support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: I welcome the opportunity to join this extended meeting of the Health Committee. I can

assure Mr Buchanan or Mr Easton that, if either wants to intervene, bring it on, lads. If they had wanted to show their commitment to health, they would have picked it as a Department. It is the biggest, toughest, hardest job, and we took it on because we care about running this country. You lot sit there —

Mr Easton: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: No, I will not give way, because he would not give way to me. I will give way shortly, because I promised to do so.

For the record, I want to congratulate Mrs O'Neill on her excellent introductory speech. It was delightful that she was able to make a 10-minute speech in about six minutes — well done. Other Members should take heed of that.

I want to point out to Martina Anderson that I did not call for a point of order whenever she referred to Cárál, Michelle and Sue. It is nice to be polite and friendly when we are talking in the Chamber, unlike the Members to my left, who are incessantly trying to make party-political points.

Indeed, it was Carmel Hanna who made by far the best intervention, and asked some interesting questions. Mr Buchanan, however, seemed to say that we cannot keep blaming problems on the past — so is he going to blame them on the future? I have never heard such incoherent rubbish. We have a Health Minister who is on top of his brief, who knows what he is doing and who is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. No amount of sniping or petty party-political posturing is going to change that.

If Members want to take me on, go ahead — I will take interventions. Let us see what they have got to say for themselves — or are they stuck to their seats?

Mr Easton: Will the Member explain why Members of his party do not attend Health Committee meetings and why, when they do, they leave early?

Mr McCallister: Does my friend want me to answer that point?

Mr B McCrea: I will take an intervention from my colleague.

Mr McCallister: Mr Easton's question is more relevant to me, since I am a member of the Health Committee. The last time that Mr Easton raised that same question, he missed the next Health Committee meeting. It is strange that he has become the self-appointed attendance officer for the Health Committee. Sometimes, Members are prevented from attending Committee meetings because they have other matters to attend to. My attendance record is not much different from the majority of other members of the Committee. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must make his remarks through the Chair. I remind Members that we are having a debate on the dental service, not on the goings-on of the Health Committee.

Mr McCallister: That is excellent advice, Mr Deputy Speaker. The attendance officer for the Health Committee should understand that. Does my honourable friend find it strange that Mr Buchanan snipes about underinvestment in the Health Service, and yet supports the draft Budget?

Mr B McCrea: I could not agree more. I cannot understand why Mr Buchanan talks about underinvestment when it was indeed his Minister who denied our Minister the resources that he needs to deliver the world-class service that our people want.

When will the DUP stop sniping from the side and start doing the job for which it was elected?

Mr Easton: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: The Member would not take an intervention, yet he wants to make one.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that an extra £500 million has been given to this year's Health budget?

Mr B McCrea: Yes, and I wonder who opposed that position. The Ulster Unionist Party has been honest and true; we have come out and said what is required. We know that there are challenges facing the provision of dental health. The Minister has brought forward proposals, and I look forward to what he has to say on the issue. I particularly look forward to hearing details of the 10-year plan that is coming through now.

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that comments were made from a sedentary position.

We want to find out what will happen next on dental provision, and I am confident that our Minister is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. I will not accept any lecturing or hectoring from people on Benches who do not know what they are talking about, whether they are on the Health Committee or not. We need to see action, and we will get action. The Ulster Unionist Party and our Minister is in charge and will deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Buchanan: It will be the first time that we have seen delivery from the UUP.

Mr Deputy Speaker: If any more remarks are made that are not directed through the Chair, some Members will find themselves going walkies.

Mr G Robinson: I will focus mainly on two specific groups that have been highlighted by various reports: disabled people, and the least wealthy people in society. Those two groups seem to have the greatest

difficulty in accessing dentists and, therefore, the dental problems that they suffer are numerically greater than those of any other grouping. As an Assembly, we must recognise and tackle that.

I pay tribute to the staff at the dental unit of the Causeway Hospital in my constituency of East Londonderry. Given his recent visit, the Minister will be aware of the efforts that are made by those staff, and I am sure that he will agree that their contribution to aiding people with disabilities has been tremendous. Their dedication has given dental pain relief to many; it is an example of how those with a disability can be treated with the additional care and patience that is often required. I ask the Minister to pay special attention to recommendation 5.1 of 'An Oral Health Strategy for Northern Ireland', which was published in 2007.

The people who attend the clinic at the Causeway Hospital are the lucky ones. Many more people with disabilities have great difficulty in accessing dental care. In some cases, that has meant years of suffering; that cannot be allowed to continue. Units such as the one at the Causeway Hospital must be developed to ensure that disabled citizens can be treated in an effective manner. Everyone must be able to access dental facilities when they need to, especially for the relief of pain. On occasions, that treatment has not been available out of hours without great inconvenience or expense to individuals. One gentleman recently told me that he was expected to travel from Coleraine to Ballymena by taxi to receive treatment at 9.00 pm. If that had been a disabled individual, how could emergency dental treatment have been secured? That is a case for the development of out-of-hours services, which is a recurring theme for me.

I turn to the problems that face people who are the least materially advantaged in society. There is a direct link between social status and dental problems. I fully acknowledge the good work that the Department has already done, but a way must be found to ensure that dental problems are no longer linked to social status. I am not referring to some Dickens novel, but to Northern Ireland in the twenty-first century, so social status should not be a barrier to dental treatment. Part of that must entail an educational message, perhaps using schools as a point of delivery. It should be tied in with overall health programmes such as those, promoting dieting or discouraging smoking, which are currently running. In the most deprived part of the United Kingdom, those messages are of even greater importance. That would also be an excellent mechanism for delivering the message early in an attempt to shift the emphasis to a preventative model of dental care.

That would tie in well with recommendation 3.3 in 'Oral Health Strategy for Northern Ireland', which was published in 2007.

I appreciate that the Minister must ensure that the value-for-money criterion is applied to any programme that might be developed; however, in order to ensure that standards are raised to the level that we all expect, some leeway should be granted to the two groups that I mentioned.

Mr Shannon: I congratulate the three Members for tabling the motion. It is an issue that concerns everyone in the Province.

It is not a full year since we last highlighted in this Chamber Northern Ireland's problems with dental-care provision. At that time, the Minister assured Members that a strategy would be implemented to address the problem. However, the problem has clearly not lessened, and that is why we are having this debate. In my constituency as in others, the problem has grown. The Minister must tell us what improvements have been made since the previous debate as a result of the additional £2 million that he set aside in June 2007. Who benefited from that extra money?

Em poositivly shair that Strenferd hisnae seen oany benefit an wud be ang shis tae ken whor tha change his' bin wroucht.

Hoo dae a' ken that Strenferd hisnae seen oany benefit? 'Weil', simpla frae tha amoont o' fowk whaur ring my offich in despair, as they canny fin a NHS dentis.

A hae tried my best tae sen fowk tae dentists that hae new patients, but they caun jist provied a' servis tae sae mony. An whiel a' tak oan boord tha point that was maed in tha las debate, that ther er mare dentists per heed in tha proavins than in Englan a' feel a' hae tae stress tha point, that mare fowk in tha Proavins need dental caer, mare than tha fowk in Englan a cause o' tha fact we hae tha worst oral hygien in tha UK.

I am positive that Strangford has not been the beneficiary, and I am anxious to know where the change has been wrought. How do I know that Strangford has not benefited? I know by the sheer volume of constituents who ring my office in despair because they cannot find an NHS dentist. I have tried my utmost to refer people to practices that accept new patients; however, those practices can only provide a service to so many people.

Although I take on board the point that was made in the previous debate — that there are more dentists per capita in the Province than in England — I must stress again that, because we have the worst oral hygiene in the United Kingdom, more people in the Province require more dental care than people in England. Consequently, our dentists are consistently busier and work on more people than dentists in England.

For example, in my constituency, I know of a self-employed young man, with a wife and five children, who, because his previous dentist was struck

off and having searched for an NHS dentist for more than a year, eventually found a dentist that could squeeze him in for an appointment. He began the process of having his teeth sorted out, including the costly procedure of having a bridge fitted; however, the dentist was so much under pressure and in demand that my constituent's next appointment was more than a month later. In that time, the root of the bridge broke, and the work was rendered useless — £200 worth of work, done for nothing.

I know of young constituents who struggle to pay for dental provision, and, given that even on the NHS they cannot afford to pay for a crown, they have teeth removed instead, which leads to a situation in which many people will require dentures before the age of 35.

I concur with my colleague George Robinson's comments about people who do not have the financial wherewithal to visit a dentist. That is intolerable, and I am anxious that such prohibitive costs should be examined. Saying that, I am well aware of the many exemptions from paying for dental care, which are good, and I welcome them. Nevertheless, the income threshold should be reconsidered in order to ensure that a 19-year-old person who is paid minimum wage and has problems with his or her teeth must not choose between paying for teeth that will last into the future and paying the car insurance premium that he or she requires in order to get to work.

During the debate last year, I highlighted the fact that neither children nor parents are taught about the benefits of preventative care, and that was acknowledged by other Members. Does the Minister's proposed strategy bring to the fore the necessity of ensuring that the next generation does not have the worst teeth — which our generation must grin through and bear — in Britain? Although it is imperative that people get a dental appointment immediately if they are in agony, it is also essential that the next generation is taught and, indeed, bombarded with information that will stop the vicious cycle in which we are caught.

I am aware of the pressure that the Minister is under; however, this problem is clearly escalating towards a crisis, and a strategy must be implemented urgently. The Minister must provide the House with information and updates that demonstrate what has been done thus far and which outline the short- and long-term strategies.

Many of us have been blessed with good teeth, but this is a serious and painful issue for those who have not. It is the duty of Members to ensure that their constituents receive the care that they need and the necessary information to teach their children and grandchildren good dental care. Members want to see healthy, happy and smiling faces, and to ensure that people smile with their own teeth, now and in the future.

6.15 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I welcome the opportunity to update Members on access to dental services. I acknowledge that registering with a Health Service dentist is increasingly problematic for many people in certain areas of Northern Ireland because of the drift by general dental practitioners towards private dentistry. That problem exists despite Northern Ireland having the highest number of dentists per 100,000 of the population out of the four UK home countries, and despite a significant increase in income for Health Service dentists over the past year.

Members may be aware that there are no contractual arrangements to compel general dental practitioners to accept patients — irrespective of their personal circumstances — for Health Service treatment. However, in most cases, dental practices continue to provide Health Service dental-care provision for adults and children who are exempt from charges. General dental practitioners who are independent contractors can choose to provide general dental services or private dentistry, or a mixture of both. Therefore, dentists can set up practices where they want and treat as many — or as few — patients under the Health Service as they want. They can also walk away from the Health Service at short notice.

My Department published a primary dental-care strategy in November 2006, which aims to modernise dental services and ensure that everyone has access to a dentist. To deliver on those reforms, the Department is negotiating with the British Dental Association to develop a new contract for Northern Ireland. A new contract was introduced in England and Wales in April 2006, but it has not been popular with the profession. That has resulted in a lack of Health Service dental services in certain areas. Therefore, we are developing a bespoke dental contract for Northern Ireland with the BDA and are working to avoid the problems that we have seen with the GB dental contract.

The new contract will give health and social services boards more control over where dentists locate their practices and whom they treat, thus improving access. It will also focus more on preventative care and will provide guaranteed out-of-hours service. Importantly, the contract will provide improved pay and conditions for Health Service dentists, which is a key area of concern that the profession has raised. Despite the best efforts of the Department to speed up the formulation of the new contract, progress has been slow. That is disappointing, but the Department is determined to agree a new contract, and I ask the British Dental Association to co-operate fully with my officials to deliver the contract for the benefit of patients.

On 17 September 2007, in the Assembly, I announced a substantial investment of almost £8 million in Health Service dentistry to address the concerns of the profession over funding for Health Service dentists. That investment comprised an additional £4 million for practice allowances to help our 361 dental practices with their overhead costs. That means that a committed Health Service dental practice receives almost £30,000 a year from the allowance, which can be used to hire staff, buy equipment or refurbish premises. That has been welcomed by the profession and has helped to boost morale among Health Service dentists.

I was also able to invest a further £3 million to help with the purchase of cross-infection control equipment to reduce the risk of infection to patients, which means that our dentists have received more funding in that area than their counterparts in rest of the UK. That also ensures that standards in our dental practices are among the highest in the British Isles. However, that investment has not drawn dentists back into the Health Service.

I also announced a significant investment in the vocational training scheme for our graduate dentists, and £500,000 was invested to incentivise dentists to train our new graduates.

In financial terms, this means that trainers — those dentists who train — receive an extra £10,000 a year. In total, the training grant is almost £19,000 a year in grants and allowances — almost double that of England and Wales. In addition, trainers get to keep the trainees' gross earnings, which on average amount to £40,000 a year. The Department also pays the trainee's salary of £29,000 a year; that makes the training of new graduates an attractive and profitable proposition for dentists. Although there was a modest increase in the number of trainers this year — 33 compared to 30 last year — we are optimistic that those numbers will continue to increase, a sentiment that is supported by the postgraduate dental dean. I hope that the profession will respond positively to the considerable increases that I have made to the training scheme.

The Department has given £400,000 to the northern and western health and social services boards to employ salaried dentists. The Northern Health and Social Services Board required three salaried dentists and has successfully recruited two, who are busy and practicing successfully. The board is on the point of recruiting a third salaried dentist.

However, the Western Health and Social Services Board has not been so fortunate. It received approval to recruit six salaried dentists to be employed across its area, and it is a matter of great regret to me that, to date, it has not yet been able to fill those posts.

It has been difficult to attract dentists to the west of the Province; however, that is not a situation that I can

accept. It is my aim that everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to access Health Service dentistry no matter where they live or their circumstances. The problems of recruitment are not because the Western Health and Social Services Board was offering small salaries; in fact, it was offering salaries of up to £53,000 per annum per dentist yet received no applicants. That demonstrates that dentists in the western area are earning more than £53,000 per annum, which is a reasonable salary.

However, the concept of salaried dentists is worth pursuing. It enables the health boards to ensure that Health Service dentistry is available where it is needed, and the Southern Health and Social Services Board and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board are submitting similar business cases for salaried dentists.

That represents an additional investment of £7.9 million in Health Service dentistry in the last financial year alone, at least £7 million of which went straight into the bank accounts of our 361 high-street dental practices. The figure that Mrs Robinson quoted of the number of dental practices dropping from 362 to 349 is not correct. There are 366 practices and 361 claimed the practice allowance. However, the fact that we are having this debate today illustrates that even this unprecedented additional investment in Health Service dentistry has not been enough to turn the tide.

Mr Easton: The Minister said that my colleague's figures were incorrect. However, they were taken from a health pack that was provided by his Department to Members.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I remind Mr Easton that it is always best to check one's figures. In August 2007, there were 366 practices, and 361 claimed practice allowance — not the 349 that Mrs Robinson claimed.

We have had to look at another means of making dental services available. I can advise the Assembly that my officials have been actively considering a further option: securing additional dental services from the independent sector through a large-scale tendering process.

By way of brief background, England, Scotland and Wales have responded to similar problems to ours by tendering for additional dental services from the private sector. Although there is limited capacity among our high-street dentists to provide that, other interested parties in other parts of the UK represent a potential supply of additional workforce.

For example, dental organisations could offer a potential source of additional dental workforce members here. Through tendering for additional dental services in Northern Ireland, the Department wants to give private providers the opportunity to bid for the

work. Such tendering exercises have been successful elsewhere in the UK, particularly in Wales, where the problem of access has been largely eliminated. In the main, those tenders have been taken up by dental corporate bodies. The main advantage of the tendering exercise is that it allows the boards to site additional services in the areas of highest access need, and contractors would largely undertake Health Service work.

Members will appreciate that as this proposal is still in its early stages, I am unable to give a firm timetable for provision. However, I am hopeful that the Department will be in a position to go out to tender in a matter of months. I will be happy to share progress on that proposal with Members as the work develops.

The introduction of additional Health Service dentists in access black spots around the country would once again give patients a choice about access to the Health Service. I am confident that the initiative has the potential to make a substantial impact on our current problems. More importantly, it will enable patients to have rapid access to Health Service dentists, thereby ensuring that the people in Northern Ireland can continue to have what most of us are determined to maintain — cradle-to-the-grave healthcare that is free for all our citizens, as envisaged originally by Nye Bevan. I strongly subscribe to that principle, as I know do most Members.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister recall Simon Hamilton's comment that the Minister's request for more money in the draft Budget was outrageous? I am also glad to see that the self-appointed attendance officer of the Health Committee is back in the Chamber — I was wondering who would mark the roll. If Mrs Robinson's contribution to the health sector over the last 10 or 15 years had been so immeasurable, why has the Minister had so many problems with which to grapple in his first year of office? Perhaps she should get another hobby, such as gardening.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have finished.

Ms S Ramsey: As someone who has no more interest in gardening than I assume the Chairperson of the Health Committee does, I think that John, Iris and other Members should engage in a proper debate about Health Service dentists. Sitting through this debate was like watching football, a Gaelic match, or teeth being pulled. We must focus on the issues that must be dealt with and move away from those others matters.

I thank all the Members who took part in the debate, and those who supported the motion. I also thank the Minister for his attendance. In most instances, the debates are sensible because we are dealing with the impact of poor health on our society, whether it is poor oral health or poor health in general.

I also thank the Chairperson of the Health Committee, who, on behalf of the Committee, supported the motion. When proposing motions, it is useful to have the support of the relevant Committee. Indeed, as others have said, my colleagues and I who tabled the motion sit on the Health Committee, and we have a right to raise issues in the Chamber. Like other Members, we get lobbied daily, indeed hourly, by our constituents on issues. For Mr Basil McCrea's information, that was the reason why the motion was proposed. It was not proposed to get a dig at the Health Minister — I think that the Minister knows us well enough to know that that was not the purpose of the motion.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Ramsey: I will give way in a moment.

Neither was the purpose of the motion to get a dig at the Ulster Unionist Party or anybody else; it was to ensure that we bring the relevant issues to the Chamber so that we can debate them, and, if need be — and where possible — make the Department, the Minister and senior civil servants accountable for their actions or inactions.

I appeal to Basil McCrea to avoid getting us into a slanging match.

6.30 pm

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. I began my contribution by thanking the Members for tabling the motion, and my reaction led other Members to attempt to turn an important issue that is worthy of the attention of the House into a political football.

I am sure that Ms Ramsey agrees that access to dental services is an important issue that needs to be sorted out, rather than be used in a game of ping-pong. The Minister deserves — and expects — the support of all for his budget and for his efforts to make progress.

Ms S Ramsey: Absolutely, and for the record, we supported the Minister in his appeal for extra money. In fact, the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety pushed to ensure that an equality impact assessment was carried out on that budget.

I am glad that Basil is actually settling, because at one stage, I thought that he was going to lose either his teeth or his dentures. *[Laughter.]*

There is concern about others turning access to dental services into a bigger issue. The lack of access to Health Service dental treatment across all board areas is affecting the most vulnerable in society. Members who spoke previously have stated that people with disabilities, including children, adults, older people and people living in rural constituencies, are hit hardest by a lack of dental treatment. Other Members said that children living in the 20% most deprived wards in the North are

twice as likely to experience dental decay than children from the 20% most affluent.

The Minister touched on prevention and the need to take a proactive approach. It is crucial that the Minister and his Department target resources towards those who have greatest need. The motion calls on the Minister to introduce an action plan to address those needs. If we were told what the action plan is, we may not need to return to the issues so often. If we are told about specific proposals and their aims, the Minister would get my support and, I am sure, that of the Health Committee during scrutiny.

A similar motion was debated in the Assembly last year, and since then, nothing appears to have changed. In fairness, the Minister gave additional money, which Sinn Féin welcomed. I think that John McCallister is happy that I am welcoming the money.

However, since the previous debate, and even with the additional money, there do not seem to have been any changes on the ground. We must examine that. It was not that long ago that people were telling local radio stations and newspapers that the situation was getting worse. Thomas Buchanan described a case where a young lad from his constituency had to travel to Strabane in severe pain because no dentist would treat him. Anyone who has ever suffered a toothache knows that when they are in that condition, they must have access to dental treatment.

In response to a question from my colleague Pat Doherty, the Minister admitted that there is a lack of treatment in the Omagh and Strabane area and a lack of dentists who are willing to accept new Health Service patients. The Minister went on to say there was no obligation on dentists to accept a patient for Health Service treatment.

That may be the reality, but we have to change it. There must be an onus on dentists to accept Health Service patients. If we say that healthcare is free at the point of delivery, we cannot say that about just part of it.

I accept that the Department is involved in negotiations with the BDA, which has a role to play. In its manifesto, the BDA states that it wants the Assembly to ensure that all patients have access to dental care. I could not disagree with that, but it is not happening. It wants to address Northern Ireland's poor oral and dental health record; I could not disagree with that either, but it is not happening. The BDA wants additional funding for all dental services to enable an increased focus on oral health promotion and prevention; I could not disagree with that, but it is not happening. It wants to safeguard and develop the community dental service to protect its role in providing care to society's most vulnerable; again, I could not disagree with that, but it is not happening.

We must adopt a responsible attitude to what the BDA says that it can provide — and I think that it can

— and towards the Department. We must push resources in that direction.

I welcome the additional funding. However, my colleague Martina Anderson stated that no dental practices in Derry are willing to take on new Health Service patients. The nearest practice that will take on those patients is in Dungiven. Martina went on to say that the situation is placing a further burden on low-income families who are being forced to take out loans to pay for treatment. Furthermore, no dental practices in Strabane, Omagh or Fermanagh are willing to take on new Health Service patients. Therefore, the situation seems to be getting worse, and the most vulnerable are being targeted. We must address equality of treatment and equality of access to treatment, and we must ensure that people do not have to travel hundreds of miles to receive that treatment.

The Minister and other Members mentioned the oral health strategy. I do not know whether it is working, or whether the primary dental strategy is working. The BDA is not meeting its commitment to ensure that all patients have access to dental care. Dentists are leaving the Health Service in favour of private work, but we must find a way of encouraging them to remain with the Health Service.

The Chairperson of the Health Committee mentioned the Scottish model and others. We should not be ashamed of looking at best practice elsewhere in the world, taking the bits that suit us, and designing our own strategy.

We must consider funding dentists to allow them to carry out Health Service work. It has been suggested that a short-term solution would be for dentists to spend one day a week working in the Health Service. Others suggested that there should be more community dental teams and clinics. They also suggested that we should actively consider a recruitment and retention strategy. It has been almost a year since Members last debated the issue and its effect on their constituencies.

If the boards are given more control, out-of-hours services are improved and prevention strategies are put in place, that is to be welcomed. However, a time frame must be put in place for the delivery of such an action plan. That will enable us to act as the conduit between the Minister and our constituents, and to deliver to our communities. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern about the lack of access to Health Service dental treatment across all Health Board areas; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to urgently bring forward an action plan to address the problem.

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

Aggregates Mapping Programme

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Cobain: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the finite nature of aggregate resources in Northern Ireland; and calls upon the Minister of the Environment to introduce an aggregates mapping programme to ensure the sustainable future of the aggregate and construction industry.

I am sure that some Members are more concerned about another type of aggregate tonight — I hope that the score is 2-0 to Barcelona.

Sustainable development has become something of a buzzword for our generation of politicians, journalists and environmentalists. Most people are now concerned about, or aware of, sustainable issues, and people are beginning to understand and act in a more sustainable manner.

The secure future of our society and the environment are inextricably linked. If this generation and the next are to have economic and social success, we must develop within the confines of our natural resources and the environment's capacities. Creating a balance among economic, social and environmental success is paramount. Although individuals and groups are becoming more enlightened, the Executive are repeating the words and sentiments of sustainable development, but they are failing to incorporate their ideas into mainstream policies. In order to make that change, we must be able to make informed decisions.

The motion intends to help the Executive — and future Executives — to make informed decisions on valuable and finite natural resources that are critical for the economic and social development of society. Moreover, the ability to make informed decisions about aggregates extraction will enable us to better protect the environment and wildlife.

The aggregates industry in Northern Ireland comprises a substantial part of the economy. In 2005, the Northern Ireland quarry products industry produced almost 26 million tons of aggregate from 160 quarries — 11% of the total production in the United Kingdom. The industry employs over 5,500 people, many of whom are from rural areas. The bulk of mineral commodities, such as natural sand, gravel, crushed rock aggregates and rock for cement, are obtained through quarrying.

The development of transport infrastructure, homes, hospitals and businesses relies on those quarries and products. However, the current development and planning system does not pay enough heed to the finite nature of those resources. With ever-increasing pressure on land

use in Northern Ireland, we must ensure that mineral resources of economic and developmental importance are not needlessly sterilised by other development. That is particularly important because, unlike other developments, it can only occur at particular sites. Therefore, the integration of an aggregates mapping system into planning and development decisions and plans in Northern Ireland is essential.

In England, Scotland and Wales, aggregates mapping systems are integrated into development and planning systems. These provisions lead to the identification of areas of aggregates existence, and the extent and nature of the sites provide reasoned justifications for either developing or not developing them.

In England, such work occurs periodically under Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6, which deals with planning for the supply of aggregates. That helps the mineral planning associations to include aggregates mineral policies in development plans and to consider individual planning applications for the extraction of aggregate minerals or the review of planning conditions at existing sites.

That is a comprehensive system that tracks the regional supply-and-demand figures in England and allows the process of aggregates extraction to be sustainably managed. No equivalent process or system to estimate regional aggregates supply-and-demand figures exists in Northern Ireland. Therefore, local planning and more expansive development are not informed and constructed with the sustainable future of aggregates resources and the construction industry in mind.

Local mineral resource mapping work is under way in Northern Ireland, and pilot projects have been carried out in the Limavady area. The Tellus survey from the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland has conducted excellent work. That survey has contributed a great baseline of knowledge about mineral resources in Northern Ireland. However, it is only the first piece in the jigsaw. We need an integrated, encompassing, long-term programme. In Northern Ireland, the Planning Service is the mineral planning authority, and, therefore, the Department of the Environment must introduce that crucial programme.

The aggregates industry has consulted with the Planning Service to develop Planning Policy Guidance 19, which creates a sustainable aggregates industry that demonstrates corporate and environmental responsibility. An integrated aggregates mapping programme should form part of that planning policy.

Mineral planning policy in Northern Ireland operates locally, with no real regional connection; that system must be overhauled. That approach only incorporates environmental factors on each site, with no regard for the overall environmental or supply-and-demand picture. A strategically led aggregates mapping system

that is integrated into the planning system and development plans is the best way to ensure the environmentally friendly and sustainable future of the aggregates industry in Northern Ireland.

The Quarry Products Association believes that funding for a Northern Ireland-wide mapping programme could be collected from an aggregates levy sustainable fund. That fund would be derived from the payments of aggregates levy and is under consideration by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Environment and Heritage Service.

The current Executive have, in numerous policy documents, pledged their commitment to sustainable development. The sustainable development strategy for Northern Ireland states that sustainable development:

“involves safeguarding and using existing resources in a sustainable way to enhance the long-term management of, and investment in, human, social and environmental resources.”

Similarly, in the regional development strategy, the Executive acknowledged that today's society requires construction aggregates. Without such minerals, there would be very little development in Northern Ireland.

It is time that the Minister and the Executive, instead of offering fine words, made some meaningful decisions and took definitive action to integrate sustainable strategies into Government policies.

6.45 pm

For too long, Northern Ireland has been considered a special economic and environmental case. With the return of devolution and local governance, we can no longer rely on those arguments as an excuse for inaction and for being out of step with our British and European counterparts on business, social and environmental concerns.

Yesterday in the Chamber, we debated the need to reduce unnecessary regulation for businesses. However, today we are asking the Minister to introduce policies, provisions and guidance that the aggregates industry is crying out for. We need regulation that has the potential to ensure the sustainable future of the construction industry, our future economic success, and the Executive's social and health projects. I urge every Member to support the motion, and I urge the Minister to take action, in consultation with her Executive colleagues, on this important issue, because whatever action she does or does not take will affect generations to come.

The Minister should push for an aggregates mapping programme to be incorporated into the future planning policy 19. That should not be a controversial action; it would be a progressive action that the Minister could easily take.

Mr Ross: The proposer of the motion said that we might have other aggregates on our minds. I suppose that one could be forgiven for thinking that we are about

to debate the merits of the away goal. Without wishing to steal Mr Kennedy's gag, during an earlier vote, there was some lobbying for Ulster Unionist away votes to be worth double, which might have helped them.

I must admit that, when I read the title of this item of business on the Order Paper, I was not entirely sure what it meant — and I may not be the only Member who was in that position. I have sought to educate myself on the topic, and I recognise its importance and the importance of mineral safeguarding. I am also aware that, in England and Wales, mineral safeguarding areas are required to be shown in all development plan documents, in order to draw the attention of any prospective planning-permission applicant to the existence of valuable mineral resources.

It seems that there is some overlap between the responsibilities of the Department of the Environment and those of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on certain matters, and it would be interesting to have the latter's input on the subject.

As Northern Ireland continues to see economic growth and significant development, it is important that we introduce measures similar to those in England and Wales. The Planning Service has a significant role to play as the minerals planning authority for the Province. It must strike a balance between protecting the environment and the need for minerals.

What must we do? It is important that we recognise the importance of our natural resources and the importance of minerals and aggregates, not only to farming, but to construction and other industries. That is particularly important to people living in rural areas.

Aggregates mapping is not a new concept, and it has its merits. I understand that substantial work has been done in that area. A comprehensive study that would produce a complete resource map of Northern Ireland would certainly be beneficial to several agencies. As I said, much of that type of work has been done in GB, and if Northern Ireland were to follow suit, decision-makers would avail themselves of the information relating to minerals that might be contained in planning policy statements, as Mr Cobain said. I note, however, that in proposing the motion, he made no reference to the time that it might take to produce such studies, or the cost. Perhaps the Minister will be able to provide such information to guide the House.

The various regions of the United Kingdom have funded aggregates-mapping research in different ways. If we were to examine the possibility of using aggregates mapping here, we would need to determine the most appropriate way in which to fund it. Back in 2002, the Chancellor announced that a levy on the sale of primary aggregates would be introduced. However, the introduction of a similar levy here might create difficulties, given that our economic competitors in the Irish Republic

share a land border with us. There was some discussion about the possibility of establishing an aggregates-levy sustainability fund in Northern Ireland. Again, perhaps the Minister will tell the House what stage that has reached.

In closing, aggregates mapping would be beneficial for Northern Ireland. If we introduce it, the information must be fed into the policy framework, and steps must be taken to safeguard minerals for local needs. I support the motion.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is just as well that Arsenal is not playing in the Champions League tonight, or the motion might have been withdrawn.

I thank the Members who proposed the motion, I agree with their view that our aggregates resources are finite.

Our natural resources are not infinite; that is a major environmental concern not only in Ireland but globally. We must take positive action on environmental concerns such as climate change and renewable energy.

Aggregates are the most commonly used construction material in Ireland; it is impossible to construct any major building or infrastructure without them. For centuries, natural sand, gravel and crushed rock have been removed from our landscape, with the vast majority used in the construction industry. The quarrying of aggregates is a major rural industry and a leading component in the economy in the North. Mr Cobain mentioned the number of jobs that it creates, and, indeed, there is a large quarrying industry in my constituency of Newry and Armagh. No one should underestimate, or disregard, the importance of the aggregates industry or its relationship with the construction industry and general economic development.

However, we must examine the impact that the aggregates industry has on our environment and landscape. Mr Cobain also mentioned that, in 2005, 26 million tons of aggregates were produced from 160 quarries. Members do not require a degree in maths to work out that such a level of production is unsustainable. Eventually, we must assess the viability of new sources for the aggregates industry. The Tellus survey, which began in 2004, made the North of Ireland:

“one of the most surveyed parts of the planet”.

That project should inform us of further reservoirs of resources.

The quarrying projects of old were necessary, but their legacy must be addressed. The Minister of the Environment, members of the Committee for the Environment, the Minister's Executive colleagues and Members of the Assembly must impose greater control on quarrying and its effect on the environmental landscape. We must strive to cause as little harm as possible to landscapes and habitats.

Quarrying is a temporary use of land, although I accept that it can last for many years. It should be a legal requirement that land is capable of being fully restored and brought back into use for the wider community at the end of its working life. I encourage the increased use of recycled aggregates, where possible. Waste from demolition or construction sites, asphalt planings from resurfacing roads and railway track ballast are among the materials that could be recycled.

I appreciate the importance of the aggregates industry to our economy. We must safeguard its sustainability, but not at any cost. Indeed, the issue highlights, once again, the need for an independent environmental protection agency to monitor future projects. I support the motion. However, if the Minister introduces an aggregates mapping programme, she must strike a balance between sustaining the aggregates and construction industries and protecting the environment. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the debate and congratulate Mr Cobain for tabling the motion on mineral resource mapping.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Attwood: Thanks.

The objectives of the motion are suitable for both the industry and the Assembly. This issue has a disproportionate effect on the society and environment of Northern Ireland, in that 11% of total aggregates in Great Britain comes from Northern Ireland.

However, we must attempt to ensure the quarry industry's sustainable development and increase its corporate social responsibilities. The Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland acknowledges that those concepts are as of much concern to them as to the House. I urge the Minister — when she is driving back to Fermanagh tonight or when she is driving up the M1 tomorrow — to look at what is happening to the Black Mountain in Belfast. That will inform her — and, in turn, the Department — of the consequences of quarrying without sustainable development or social corporate responsibility.

If, as she drives in, the Minister takes a good look to her left at the Black Mountain, she will see a gaping hole in the side of one of the city's major assets — one of the mountains that embraces it. If one climbs to the top of the Black Mountain, one will see a growing hole created by quarrying, which stands in marked contrast to the beautiful vista from the mountain over the city of Belfast and Belfast Lough.

The motion has enormous merit. However, the quarrying industry must be challenged as never before on its responsibility to develop in a sustainable fashion.

The Minister should — for want of a better word — bore into what has happened in west Belfast around the

Black Mountain to see an example of the worst practice in planning mineral extraction and quarrying in the North of Ireland. The minerals and quarries unit of the Planning Service approved permission for the quarries, but thereafter washed its hands of its responsibility to sustainable development and to making sure that quarry owners fulfilled their obligations to society. The Planning Service laid down a wide range of conditions in respect of the Black Mountain, but the vast majority of them were ignored. The service stated that the top of the mountain had to be protected; that quarrying in certain directions was prohibited; and that the plant had to be removed from the front of the mountain. All those restrictions were ignored.

For decades, people such as Terry Enright — and Members who represented West Belfast in this Chamber — have campaigned for the Black Mountain. Former Northern Ireland Minister Richard Needham visited the mountain at one stage and landed by helicopter; he almost ordered quarrying to stop because of the unjustifiable rape and pillage of the mountain.

The problem is not over. The Minister's predecessor in a former mandate, Sam Foster, confirmed that there is planning permission and sufficient aggregates on the Black Mountain for another 40 years' quarrying. What sort of planning and sustainable development allows a mountain to be taken down ton by ton? A beautiful asset is being destroyed in the process.

If the motion is to mean anything, the Minister should learn from the abuses that took place on the Black Mountain.

Mr Weir: I am happy to confess that this is not a subject on which I have a great deal of expertise — I bring to it a healthy ignorance. As Members will testify, being completely ignorant of a subject has not stopped me from contributing in the past. Today is no exception.

I do not question the bona fides of Members, but there have been far fewer interventions in this debate than there were in the debate on local government — that is not a challenge to Basil McCrea to intervene. Like other Members, I am keen to observe events tonight at the "theatre of dreams" and to see United move towards a third European title.

There was a suggestion during the debate on the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill that the Mourne might have to be levelled, and Roy Beggs seemed to call for the levelling of the Antrim Plateau. Given that, it is appropriate that we are discussing aggregates.

The last Member spoke passionately on the subject; I have never heard him so passionate without mentioning the word "collusion".

With respect to Mr Attwood, although we are keen to ensure that there is proper protection of the environment, we should not be too harsh about the good work that

the construction industry and the Quarry Products Association are doing for the economy.

7.00 pm

The cliché is that “there’s no business like show business” — I think that in practice there is no business like the construction industry and the quarry products situation, which have made a very strong contribution to the debate. *[Laughter.]*

When I first saw the motion on the Order Paper, its importance initially escaped me. However, having looked into the matter, in the words of KT Tunstall: “Suddenly I see” the importance of the issue.

Mapping has been implemented in England successfully, and there have been some preliminary test cases here. DETI has been working in Strabane, Omagh and Limavady, and the programme used there could be rolled out. There is no doubt that the advantages of having a mapping system that operates across Northern Ireland are clear; the least possible strain should be put on social and environmental parameters. The benefits to Northern Ireland from an ecological and an economic point of view are manifest, and I welcome that the matter is under consideration, through PPS 19 and mineral developments. I look forward to what the Minister has to say on the subject.

As an aside — regarding the long-term strategy of mapping — Queen’s University ended its geology degree around 10 years ago, so there may be problems in ensuring that we have enough expertise. That also needs to be considered. My colleague Alastair Ross highlighted that the advantages are clear. However, consideration must be given to ensuring that the financial back up exists to ensure that we retain the necessary expertise.

Looking at the aggregates levy, on which firms in Northern Ireland receive tax relief, it is clear that given the financial pressures that the construction and quarry industries are facing, it would be wrong to try and pass any additional costs on to the industries at present. That means that, whether it is a question of looking at sustainability funds or making a business case to the Department of Finance and Personnel, there should be something that can be of benefit, not simply to the economy and to the environment, but in producing something sustainable for future generations. I welcome the proposals.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Quarry Products Association has a slogan which states that minerals can only be worked where they are found, and it is unfortunate that rock can only be quarried where there are rocks. It is also unfortunate that rocks tend to be found in environmentally sensitive areas, due to their visual beauty and for many

other environmentally sensitive reasons. It is very important that we realise how important it is that the quarrying industry can only be allowed to survive within the environmentally friendly parameters that should be set for it. This is what the quarry industry has in mind. It has no desire whatsoever to offend the environment.

I am happy to say that the Lagan Group, one of the biggest quarrying and aggregates firms in this country and across the water, has previously been awarded certificates for the environmentally-friendly way in which it conducts its businesses.

The news is not as bad as Alex Attwood would have us believe. Black Mountain defied planning regulations, but if Members want another bad example they should drive across the Glenshane Pass towards Dungiven, and they will find the ugliest quarry in Ireland on their right-hand side. It is not in use, but it may begin to work again — hopefully under better and more environmentally friendly conditions.

We need aggregates, however; without them there will be no construction industry. Most people say that the construction industry is now our biggest industry; bigger than agriculture, which, traditionally, was accepted as the biggest. As businesses have to be environmentally friendly, the opportunities to quarry are limited. They are even more finite than they might otherwise have been. Quarry people are determined to obey the environmental demands that are imposed upon them.

We are limited to rocks that are not pretty or in environmentally sensitive areas, but which are essential to prosperity and quality of life for us all. Without those rocks, the construction industry could not exist — as I said earlier. The construction industry is important, and we only realise that now when it is beginning to wane. I spoke to the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) this morning, and it is very concerned about the industry. That highlights the importance of the issue and how important it is that the aggregates industry continues.

The industry produces £300 million worth of products per year and provides jobs, largely in rural areas where other sources of employment are hard to come by. Some 75% of the areas in which the industry provides jobs have been designated as TSN areas by the Government.

The mapping programme will have two main advantages, one of which is that it will accept or reject quarries, sources of aggregate — sand and gravel — in areas which fulfil environmental conditions. Therefore it will make it easier for those who want to go into the business to get planning permission when the time comes to put their hands in their pockets, and there are many such people. Many of them are stymied by the terrible Planning Service. The Assembly must examine that issue seriously; otherwise people will continue to

be constrained from getting into business. It is taking some people five years to receive planning permission to extract sand and gravel.

The other side is that the aggregates industry will be sustainable, and the Planning Service will not have to grant planning permission for other types of construction or buildings in the area.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I thought that we were going to get through a debate without an attack on the Planning Service, but, alas, it was too much to ask. The understanding of Northern Ireland's natural resource base is fundamental to planning and sustainable development issues and to ensuring the sustainable future of the aggregates and construction industry.

The proposer of the motion was correct when he talked about the new buzz phrase — and I am not talking about the Manchester United match. When Peter Weir mentioned the United match, I thought that he was talking about Leeds United, because that is the only United that is allowed in our house. I was talking about sustainable development, and Fred Cobain will know that sustainable development used to be the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, but it now sits in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It also impacts, as most Members will know, on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Finance and Personnel, to name but a few.

Just this week, I wrote to the junior Ministers about setting up a ministerial subcommittee on sustainable development, since most of the issues surrounding sustainable development are cross-cutting. I hope that the House will welcome that move.

Mr Attwood mentioned the Black Mountain, which, as he knows, has a nineteenth-century quarry, so it has been in operation for some considerable time. Nowadays, we have environmental impact assessment regulations, higher environmental standards; the rehabilitation of quarries has been made a condition of planning consent and there has also been the Review of Mineral Permissions (ROMPs). Furthermore, rehabilitation can involve environmentally friendly public-good uses, such as the successful bird sanctuary in Castle Espie, County Down. However, those factors do not address the enforcement issues that Mr Attwood raised. I hear his passionate plea regarding the Black Mountain, and I am happy to speak to him about concerns that he has regarding the breaking of planning conditions.

Returning to the motion, I am aware of the valuable contribution that minerals — and aggregates in particular — make to the prosperity of the Province and to its quality of life. The aggregates industry provides employment, often in rural locations as Mr Brolly

pointed out, and produces a wide range of products for a variety of purposes — in construction, agriculture and industry. 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' contains the regional planning policy for mineral extraction. That policy requires that an assessment be made of the need for a mineral resource, balanced against the need to protect and conserve the environment. It also recognises that minerals can be worked only where they are found, although there may be a choice of sites for common minerals such as aggregates.

The Department is preparing PPS 19, which is a planning policy statement on mineral developments. As part of that process, there has been engagement with all the relevant stakeholders, including representatives from the industry and the Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland. Planning policy statements are expressions of regional policy and normally do not include spatial information nor do they map areas. Introducing a programme of aggregates mapping was raised through the stakeholders' forum as part of the normal PPS process. That stage of the process was recently completed, and this matter will ultimately be contained in the normal scoping paper that goes to me as Minister.

It is worth noting that Planning Service has commissioned reports of that nature, specifically to aid the production of area plans for locations with concentrations of quarries and aggregates resources. Colleagues in the geological survey section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment were commissioned to produce mineral resource information for the districts of Strabane, Omagh and Limavady. Discussions are ongoing about how best to develop that work for other areas and about potential funding options.

Mr Cobain also mentioned the Tellus programme, the launch of which I attended last year and which is also very useful. The reports produced to date by the geological survey section of DETI delineated and described important sand and gravel resources in the areas that they examined, set against national environmental designations. They provided information to assist with mineral policy formulation, local plans, and with decisions on individual planning applications.

However, there is a growing need to understand the entire resource base of Northern Ireland. Introducing a programme of aggregates mapping as a one-off exercise would benefit policy development, local plans and decision making. Geological information already exists in various forms and at different levels. Colleagues in the geological survey section could use their existing database along with additional work as part of the programme to map, sample and compile information to produce detailed aggregate maps that would allow evidence-based decision making in the future.

In addition to collating natural resource occurrences, an aggregates mapping programme involves logging geological information along with environmental designation, spatial strategy data, area plan information and any other relevant policy data in a geographic information system. Close examination of those data could inform decisions to ensure that mineral development is permitted where it infringes least on social and environmental parameters. Such an approach has been completed for many parts of England and Scotland and is about to commence in Wales.

The result has been that the planning authorities are informed where the optimum locations for quarries occur, not only from an environmental and social perspective, but also as part of a fuel-miles carbon-reduction strategy.

7.15 pm

How long would it take to produce the aggregates map? The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland has indicated that it will need to augment its data before bringing in expertise from the British Geological Survey, and it is estimated that the work would take about one year to complete.

Mr Ross asked how much it would cost. That can be answered only when the normal tendering process is complete. The cost of producing a methodology to do that work will not be part of the cost to Northern Ireland, as it has already been carried out in other areas such as England and Scotland.

The Government funded the studies in England. More recently, in Scotland and Wales, the funding was received from the aggregates levy sustainability fund. The aggregates levy is an environmental tax on the commercial extraction of aggregates in the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, we have a similar tax relief scheme — the aggregates levy credit scheme. Operators must apply to join that voluntary scheme to be eligible for 80% relief, and, in return for the tax relief, members must agree to carry out continued environmental improvements.

The aggregates levy sustainability funds were formally launched in England, Scotland and Wales in 2002 with the aims of reducing the environmental impacts of the extraction of aggregates, both on land and from sea, and delivering benefits to areas subject to those impacts. It is those sustainability funds that were used to pay for the aggregates mapping programmes in Scotland and Wales.

Northern Ireland has not yet set up a sustainability fund. However, the planning and environmental policy group in my Department submitted a business case for the introduction of an aggregates levy sustainability fund in Northern Ireland to DFP. Following discussions with DFP, the business case is currently being revised

with a view to setting up a fund in 2008-09, subject to the request for funds being successful.

My Department is actively pursuing the option of introducing a programme of aggregates mapping to support the planning policy statement on minerals, to support future local plans and to aid decision-making. However, I cannot currently commit to a final decision until I have fully explored the funding options for progressing the programme in the absence of an aggregates levy sustainability fund. I assure Members that that will be examined as a matter of urgency.

Mr McCallister: I have been informed by my colleague that I have two minutes to make the winding-up speech. Therefore, I intend to take 10 minutes. I am pleased that the debate has proven to be such a crowd-puller. There are two Ministers in the Chamber, so it has been worthwhile. Luckily my team — Rathfriland Swifts — is not playing tonight.

Mr Cobain opened the debate by laying out some of the facts about how important the quarrying industry is, with 5,500 employees, and the influence that it has on our entire infrastructure, building the case for mapping, planning and sustainable development.

Like other Members, Mr Ross confessed that he did not know a lot about the motion. That was obvious to me earlier today, as many people asked me what the motion was about.

Mr Kennedy: Were you able to answer them?

Mr McCallister: I would be now that the Minister has so eloquently explained it.

All Members accepted the importance of the quarrying industry to the economy. Mr Attwood mentioned that 11% of the total UK product comes from Northern Ireland. Given Northern Ireland's size compared to the rest of the UK, that is a huge contribution. He then talked about local issues, including environmental damage and poor decisions. Follow-up and enforcement issues are vital if we are to avoid the type of environmental damage that Mr Attwood mentioned.

Me Weir confessed to a healthy amount of ignorance. However, he was not going to stop at that. He acknowledged the good work of the Quarry Products Association. It is amazing how football, a pop singer and collusion can be referred to in one speech during a debate about aggregates. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Weir has had a very long day, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Financial backup is important, as it will guarantee that the programme can be put in place without additional cost to the industry. Although the Minister indicated that finances for it are not available at the moment, I was pleased that she said that she will consider the proposal.

After hearing Mr Weir's point, I wonder whether the aggregates mapping programme will have any impact

on council boundaries, given the earlier debate about whether some councils will get more resources than others. Mr Brolly gave his grasp of —

Mr B McCrea: His quality impact assessment.

Mr McCallister: I know. We were told that the ugliest quarry in Ireland is near Dungiven; Mr Brolly is working hard to get that re-opened. *[Laughter.]*

Rocks are essential to the economy. Mr Brolly mentioned the figure of £300 million, and he made the very serious point that the programme would provide employment in rural areas, many of which are areas of social need. Mr Brolly also asked why it takes five years to get permission from the Planning Service.

The Minister mentioned that sustainable development was an OFMDFM matter. The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes the news that the Minister is pressing for a subcommittee to be set up to consider sustainable development. The Minister highlighted some of the issues concerning enforcement, and she acknowledged the contribution of the industry.

I was encouraged to hear that the Minister is considering the aggregates mapping programme. She told us that it would take approximately one year to complete and that she is trying to secure the funding and not put any costs on to the industry. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the finite nature of aggregate resources in Northern Ireland; and calls upon the Minister of the Environment to introduce an aggregates mapping programme to ensure the sustainable future of the aggregate and construction industry.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — *[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

ADJOURNMENT

Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Spratt: I promise not to mention football, and I promise to get everyone away as quickly as possible.

I thank the Business Committee for providing the opportunity to debate this topic this evening. Sandy Row is an area that is known throughout the Province. It is close to Belfast city centre, and it is one of the 10% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. As a working-class Protestant community, it was subject to the task force that was established by the then Minister with responsibility for Social Development, John Spellar, to address the needs of such communities.

Sandy Row was rightly identified as an area that is in need of major attention. Long gone are the days when Sandy Row was a community that benefited from the employment that heavy industry created and from the thriving small-business ethos that had always been part of the area. It could no longer stand on its own two feet; it needed — and continues to need — Government assistance.

I welcome the Minister for Social Development to the debate this evening. I believe that she can, and will, address issues of concern for the area in the future. First, the social housing stock in Sandy Row must be considered. It must be assessed as to whether it enables a stable family nucleus to develop in the area.

The task force report of 2004 highlighted that 59% of Housing Executive homes in the area had fewer than three bedrooms. It is clear that if a community is to be sustained by keeping families in the area, the provision of three- or four-bedroom family homes is essential. Furthermore, it is important people in the area can afford those new units.

The low uptake last year by elderly folk from Sandy Row for places in Ulidia House highlighted the need for costs to be deemed reasonable for local people. We must also ensure that local people are informed of ways to get on to the property ladder to increase private home ownership in Sandy Row as a means of creating a stronger community ethos.

The concept of a Living Over The Shop (LOTS) scheme has been pursued in order to upgrade the main Sandy Row frontage. That is a positive initiative, and the Minister should do all in her power to bring the scheme to fruition.

The people of Sandy Row are, quite rightly, proud. They want to see their area look well for visitors and for the many hundreds of commuters who go through the area every day. If one were to walk or drive along Sandy Row today, one would see excellent businesses fronting the area, but many derelict sites and empty shop units could also be seen. The Living Over The Shop scheme would help to address that issue.

Following on from the LOTS scheme, we must also examine local business and see what can be done to entice economic development into the Sandy Row area. We must also ensure that the community has the services that it needs and deserves. In July 2004, of the 108 units that made up the Sandy Row shopping area, only 69, or 64%, were in use by businesses. We must ensure that any assistance that is required is given to those who wish to start up, expand or redevelop in the area.

The task force identified a real area of concern concerning adult literacy, and the low levels of adult literacy in Sandy Row must be tackled head on. Some measures have been taken to tackle that problem, but we must ensure that all that can be done to improve adult literacy is done.

I realise that work has been done to tackle some of the issues in Sandy Row. The house builds for the Charter Youth Club site and the Lilly Bar site are welcome — particularly the emphasis on family homes. The recent improvement scheme to existing stock is good, but more can and must be done to improve housing standards in the area.

The neighbourhood warden service, which was introduced in response to the ministerial task force report, is also welcome and of great benefit to the community, which makes very good use of the service. Furthermore, the provision of a community house in Sandy Row for the local residents' association is a positive step, and we thank the Housing Executive for that.

The funding crisis that faces the Kids into Education and Training (KITE) Project has been raised in recent weeks. That project helps many children in the Sandy Row area. It is a vital service that is doing a fantastic job, and I hope that the Department of Education will help to sustain that project. I urge the Minister for Social Development to assess whether she can do anything to help that project in any way — the folk in that area would be most grateful.

I recognise that the Department for Social Development has made some good opening moves to help the community of Sandy Row in recent years, particularly since the task force report. However, much more can

and must be done. Further environmental schemes must be completed, and more must be done to improve the frontage of the Sandy Row area, given its close proximity and importance to the city centre and the Shaftesbury Square area. That can be done by ensuring that the correct assistance is given to businesses, particularly those wishing to start up in the area.

I am glad that other MLAs from South Belfast are in the Chamber. I hope that we will all be able to sing from the same hymn sheet and work together.

7.30 pm

Having scored the great victory, if you like, in the Village area, and seeing that project now coming to fruition, it is important that we continue to look to areas such as Sandy Row so that our entire city can be included in the vibrancy that we see in Belfast daily. We want to be able to encourage people — visitors in particular — to the area and to show that there are small businesses and many other facilities there for them to use, in the same way that in other cities throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, and throughout Europe, there are specific areas that have something special about them. Given some Government forethought, we could make this an important area for the city centre.

Mr McGimpsey: I endorse Mr Spratt's remarks, and I thank him for securing this Adjournment debate. As someone who has represented Sandy Row on Belfast City Council and in the Assembly for the past 15 years — my constituency office has been based there for the past 10 years — I am intimately acquainted with the area and its needs. It is a disadvantaged community in inner south Belfast that has suffered a great deal, particularly through redevelopment, and it displays all the conditions that one would expect in such an area in issues such as health and education.

People from Sandy Row want several issues to be dealt with. A number of years ago, the Sandy Row Community Forum was formed, and it can speak for the community there. In the past year, activity has increased, as has expectation in the local community, which has seen the return of devolution and a local Minister in place. The community has seen how well it has done through the Greater Village Regeneration Trust, and it is now able to articulate the many needs of the area.

Before redevelopment, Sandy Row had a community of some 12,000 people; now it has a population of some 2,500 people. When the area was redeveloped, most families moved out, leaving only an elderly population. Houses were then redeveloped, primarily for that elderly population, leaving a high proportion of two-bedroom houses and flats. Therefore, the community age profile does not fit with the rest of Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive must intervene,

and I have had a number of important discussions with it, which, to date, have not borne fruit. However, over the past couple of years, with the establishment of the Sandy Row Community Forum and the task force report that addressed the needs of working-class Protestant communities that produced recommendations, there appears to be some hope about implementation.

Investment is needed, which does not need to be massive. It is clear from the shop fronts that, not untypically, redevelopment took place in the housing core, and the commercial core was abandoned. The population shrank because of the Troubles and the difficulties that Belfast city centre went through, and there were business failures in the shopping core, which illustrate a level of neglect and underinvestment.

Developers are also buying and holding — that is, buying a property and waiting for the price to rise. One of the best and most valuable sites in Northern Ireland, at Hope Street and Wellwood Street, which is now the location for one hotel, was taken over 10 years ago, given to a developer by the Housing Executive — and there the site sits. It was to have been fully developed within five years to a plan agreed between the Sandy Row Community Forum and the developer, and overseen by the Housing Executive, but that enormous site is just sitting there in the city centre.

The site was intended to provide important linkage for traffic flow and planning between the city centre and the community. That is a further example of Government intervention going wrong and having a negative impact on the community.

A primary school is required, and primary education, in general, needs investment. Education is vital to the area, and I was profoundly disappointed by the lack of funding for the after-school Kids into Education and Training (KITE) project in Sandy Row. I cannot think of a more disadvantaged community from which funding could be removed — but it happened.

The community has a strong cultural tradition. Areas of north Belfast have been defined as cultural quarters, and it is an excellent idea to similarly define Sandy Row as a cultural quarter of south Belfast. It sits cheek by jowl with Belfast city centre and beside the intense economic activity of Great Victoria Street.

Many visitors walk through Sandy Row because it is a well-known area but, sadly, they do not stop. Help and investment is needed to ensure that visitors stop and spend in Sandy Row. It is one of the most famous areas in Belfast, if not Northern Ireland, and the name of Sandy Row rings throughout Northern Ireland. The South Belfast Cultural Society, which is based in Sandy Row, could play an important part in the area's being identified as a cultural quarter.

Sandy Row could become an urban village with a strong local identity at its core, and it could also integrate

with the city centre and the rest of south Belfast. As a cultural quarter, it would be warm and welcoming to visitors and place a strong emphasis on tourism and attracting investment that works for the local community. Such an opportunity gives us reason to anticipate success.

Sandy Row is among the best commercial areas in Belfast, as it is so close to the city centre, and it seems absurd that retailers there do so badly. The problems are not overwhelming, but the Minister must lead a co-ordinated approach, including DSD and the Housing Executive, to focus on redevelopment and make the area more attractive to commercial investment. She has already shown her commitment to similar initiatives in areas such as the Village. The area and the community will respond magnificently to such an initiative, which would benefit not only Sandy Row and south Belfast, but the city centre and Northern Ireland.

Mrs Hanna: I thank Mr Spratt for securing the Adjournment debate on the regeneration of Sandy Row in my constituency of South Belfast. I think of Sandy Row as the area from the Boyne Bridge, over the railway line, to the bottom of the Lisburn Road. However, too many years ago, when I came to train to be a nurse at Belfast City Hospital, Sandy Row was bustling and thriving. It was full of small shops and businesses that offered a myriad goods and services.

Regrettably, after decades of the Troubles, badly needed housing redevelopment, depopulation and economic decline, the community of Sandy Row is a shadow of its former self, and its continued viability is threatened. If it is to survive as a community, the local population must be helped to adapt to change, and the Assembly must work with those who want that change.

Companies that were part of the former anchor industries, such as Murray's Tobacco Works, the Linfield Mill and the Albion Clothing Company have long since disappeared. However, I am glad to say that some businesses, such as Reids Shoes, adapted to the changing circumstances, and they remain and continue to prosper.

Sandy Row is part of the Shaftesbury ward, and, by my estimate, there are little more than 600 people on the register at present. That means that the population of the area, including children, is probably just over 1,000. The ward is the twenty-third most deprived ward in Northern Ireland out of a total of 582, which places it in the top 5% of deprivation. That placement is based on the statistics for income, employment, health deprivation, disability, education, skills, training, crime and disorder. Only 15% of school-leavers go on to higher education, compared to 30% for Belfast as a whole. The percentage of the post-primary population that is entitled to free school meals, and the percentage of adults who are claiming income support and incapacity benefit, are twice the Belfast average.

Those statistics present a challenge to the Assembly and the Executive. I have every confidence that the Minister for Social Development will tackle those problems as vigorously and as proactively as she did in dealing with the nearby Village area. A taskforce of senior DSD civil servants has been established to deliver a neighbourhood renewal strategy. I know that the Minister will work with those people who want to see the best for their community. I urge the Minister to liaise with the Education Minister to ensure that everything is done to help Blythefield Primary School. As has been said, a lot has already been done. There is a new community resource centre on Sandy Row; there is the new multi-purpose sports ground beside the Charter Youth Club; and there have been more than 230 homes built since 2000. A departmental task force has been established.

Sandy Row has many advantages on which, in the right circumstances, it can capitalise. It is situated only a few hundred yards from the city centre. We are told that the city centre is enjoying a boom in tourism, so I hope that, being so close, Sandy Row can capitalise on that. There has been significant private-sector investment in the area, such as Days Hotel on Hope Street, the redevelopment of Linfield industrial estate, and the Whitehall Square apartment and shops development at the end of Sandy Row. I commend these investors, and encourage others.

Unfortunately, Sandy Row is polluted with murals that support paramilitary organisations such as the Ulster Freedom Fighters. I cannot think of a bigger turn-off for tourists newly arrived in Belfast than that awful mural at the corner of Sandy Row and Linfield Road which depicts a masked man with a rifle and proclaims that “You are now entering loyalist Sandy Row”. Frankly, the murals that proclaim support for violence, which are painted by shadowy men, have no part in our society; I wish that those who put them up would learn a lesson from other places where such murals have been replaced with those of famous footballers and the like. There are many who have made their mark in the Sandy Row area, including Tommy Dickson, of Linfield Football Club, and John Stewart Bell, who made a great contribution to physics. A lot that is positive has yet to happen in Sandy Row.

Ms Lo: I want to thank Jimmy Spratt for raising this subject. I endorse all the views that have been expressed by the other MLAs, and I share their concerns about the area. It is a shame that a once-thriving community and business area should have been allowed to decline to become one of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.

I was reading the Sandy Row Community Forum’s strategy, ‘Sandy Row: 2015’, which has a vision to make Sandy Row a prosperous and attractive place for people to live, work, visit and invest in. Within the

document, there are strategic objectives to promote Sandy Row, to improve the environment, to generate social and economic development, and to create a vibrant and renewed community life through partnerships.

I certainly agree with and endorse all the other Members’ pleas for a co-ordinated effort to promote the area, led, perhaps, by DSD.

Now that there is peace and stability, it is about time that efforts were concentrated to revive that once prosperous and viable community, which has been blighted by the Troubles and by economic decline.

7.45 pm

There is a great need to generate a positive identity for Sandy Row. Belfast City Council’s neighbourhood development funding forum has taken forward a recommendation from the strategic plan for a marketing and promotion strategy. Much good work has been done, aspects of which Members have already mentioned. Sandy Row should be included in the branding programme to make Belfast city a place to visit and in which to invest, and it should be part of the regeneration strategy to promote tourism in Belfast. It is only a short distance from the city centre and can be a gateway to south Belfast, which has many attractions, amenities and diversity.

Sandy Row has become quite run-down. I support the call in the strategic plan to create a positive and attractive physical environment that will encourage people to come to the area to live, to shop, to visit and to invest. The area is rich in cultural and historic points of interest, with its involvement in, for example, world wars and local industries, as well as the many lively stories of local characters. With pride in its heritage and its forward-looking vision, a Sandy Row cultural quarter could be a reality, as Mr McGimpsey said earlier. Other cities throughout the world, such as New York and San Francisco, are made up of many different quarters that offer a variety of perspectives and cultural diversity.

I endorse other Members’ comments that there is a great need to have more social housing for families so that they can stay in the area and ensure the community’s sustainability. The LOTS scheme, which Jimmy Spratt mentioned, is a worthwhile pursuit to consider, as it will help to regenerate the area, not only to contribute to the daytime and evening economy but to provide sound investment opportunities for local retailers and developers.

The Kids Into Education and Training project is another worthwhile initiative that helps families and young people. It enables women to return to work and helps young children with homework and social development. The provision of continued funding for that project must be considered.

As other Members said, the area has been uplifted in recent years — in the past year, four new specialist shops have opened in the area; a lay-by creation scheme is also in operation to help shoppers with parking. All those good initiatives should be built upon. Other Members referred to plans for the community resource centre and multi-sports facility. Therefore there is hope that the area will experience regeneration, not only in economic spheres but in social and cultural spheres as well.

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I thank Jimmy Spratt for the opportunity to discuss the regeneration of Sandy Row; I also thank the Members for South Belfast for their contributions to this important debate. If my response does not address each of the points that were raised, I am happy to write to Members when Hansard is available.

As part of the south-west Belfast neighbourhood renewal area, Sandy Row is a recognised area of deprivation. People who live in such areas are more likely to be out of work or, when they have jobs, to be poorly paid. The economic stresses of unemployment and low incomes can be linked to social problems, such as poor health, low educational achievement and high crime rates.

I agree with Mr McGimpsey that the people of Sandy Row deserve better from our devolved Administration. Economic deprivation can also lead to environmental problems, characterised by poor housing conditions, derelict buildings, undeveloped sites and poor services. There is no quick fix to deprivation. However, through the work of my Department and in conjunction with my ministerial colleagues, I am determined to tackle it in all of its forms across Northern Ireland.

Successful regeneration of the area must include progress on all those fronts and must actively engage with and involve local communities throughout the process. Mr Spratt raised the issue of housing, particularly from the aspect of family and affordable housing. I say to Mr Spratt and the Members of the House, that Sandy Row will continue to witness significant housing renewal in the coming years.

Ulidia Housing Association will build three large family homes on the Charter youth club site, and next year BIH Housing Association will start a major new development at Albion Street. The Housing Executive has made significant progress on a number of fronts in the area. For example, it is carrying out a comprehensive environmental improvement scheme, which has had a positive impact on not just housing, but on the surrounding environment in Sandy Row. It has worked closely with Groundwork NI and the community itself to deliver a communal garden at Blythe Street, a small community garden in Sandy Row and a play park at City Way.

In partnership with the Sandy Row community forum, it is pursuing the introduction of the LOTS scheme as

part of a regeneration strategy for the main Sandy Row frontage. I agree with Mr Spratt that the scheme can help to further regenerate the frontage of Sandy Row.

The Housing Executive has also provided a community house in Sandy Row and introduced a neighbourhood warden service to the area. I was pleased to hear that Mr Spratt welcomes that service. Of course notwithstanding Mr McGimpsey's concerns, the Housing Executive has built up an excellent relationship with most community representatives, and I am confident that that relationship will continue. I want it to continue, and I am determined to ensure that it will.

I visited Sandy Row at the end of last year and had the opportunity to listen to the concerns of the people working and living in the area. Over the past few years there has been, and continues to be, a range of initiatives focused on helping to regenerate the area. Members will be aware of the cross-departmental task force, to which all Members who contributed to the debate today referred. That was set up in 2004 to identify and examine the particular problems that Sandy Row faces. It resulted in a report containing 156 recommendations, of which 125 have already been implemented to bring about real improvements to the people. The outstanding recommendations have been incorporated into the south-west Belfast neighbourhood renewal partnership's action plan. I am confident that Sandy Row will benefit from that plan. In fact, my Department had already committed almost £500,000 in the last three years towards improving the economic and social environment of that community.

I have referred to the importance of partnership arrangements in achieving success. I agree with Mr McGimpsey that the community has a vital role to play in helping Government interventions in Sandy Row. The south Belfast partnership, the south-west Belfast neighbourhood renewal partnership and the Sandy Row community forum have all contributed positively to our work in that area.

I want to assure Mr Spratt and the other Members for South Belfast, and all other Members of the House, that DSD will continue to work with all of our partners to tackle deprivation and deliver real change for that community.

The planned development of the former Lilly Bar site and the recently completed programme of environmental improvement schemes along Sandy Row are just two examples of the role that my Department already plays in the area.

Mr McGimpsey's idea for a cultural quarter, to which Anna Lo also referred, is interesting, and I will ask my officials to explore that, in conjunction with our neighbourhood renewal partnerships. I can also report that I have approved funding of £756,000 for the multi-purpose sports pitch and changing facility at

Blythe Street. I know that the community is looking forward to the day when it can use that high-quality sports facility. Along with the community and the local public representatives, I want to see that happen and I want to be with them when that happens.

My colleague Carmel Hanna referred to Blythefield Primary School. I am happy to talk to my ministerial colleague the Minister of Education about that issue because I believe that other Ministers have a role to play and a commitment to Sandy Row. There must be cross-departmental and cross-ministerial responsibility to the area.

Jimmy Spratt raised the issue of family housing. The waiting lists reflect a fairly low demand for family-sized housing in Sandy Row. However, that will be addressed by the Albion Street scheme. Mr Spratt, Michael McGimpsey and Anna Lo mentioned the KITE scheme. That scheme is not funded by DSD; it is funded by the Department of Education until the end of the 2008-09 academic year, and it hopes to source money from elsewhere after that. The neighbourhood renewal action plan for the area should assist in prioritising future services and needs for Sandy Row, but I will ensure that the Minister of Education is aware of the issues in relation to that project that have been raised this evening.

Mr McGimpsey raised the issue of shop frontages. Through a pilot exercise, my Department is currently exploring the possibility of providing technical or funding assistance to improve shop fronts and streetscapes. Although that initiative is still at an early stage of development, it may provide scope in the future for developing shop fronts in other areas of Belfast.

Anna Lo mentioned the 'Sandy Row: 2015' strategy document. I commend the work of the Sandy Row Community Forum in publicising its strategy for 2015. I am aware that the forum is progressing a number of recommendations in the report. Carmel Hanna referred to the long industrial history of Sandy Row, of which we are all aware. I am conscious that Members want to see the revitalisation that has already begun in the area to continue. My Department subscribes to that.

I thank Members for their contributions, and I assure them of my continued support for the regeneration of the Sandy Row area. Many years ago, I visited Sandy Row — as a young student at Queen's, I used to go to the butcher's shops and the greengrocers, and I found it to be a vibrant community. I know that it is the earnest desire of Members for that type of activity to be revitalised and to provide a sense of vibrancy to the community. Hopefully, as an arterial route into the centre of Belfast, that will continue.

On a final note, I hope that we will have further good news to report on the Village project, adjacent to Sandy Row.

Adjourned at 8.00 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 6 May 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Burnside: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The amendments tabled for the first item of business — the Consideration Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill — on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are only in the name of the junior Minister Jeffrey Donaldson. Before embarking, will you clarify whether that is normal procedure? Are the amendments being tabled on behalf of the DUP? Should they not be tabled in the names of both junior Ministers, including Mr Gerry Kelly?

Mr Speaker: According to Standing Orders, that is all that is required from the junior Minister, and the Member should know that.

SPEAKER'S BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform Members that I will be absent from the Assembly on Monday 12 May and Tuesday 13 May, as I will be visiting the Canadian Parliament with the Assembly Commission.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Public Health (Amendment) Bill

Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: The Public Health (Amendment) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Public Health (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 became law today.

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Members have a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments, detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the Speaker's provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are three groups of amendments, and we shall debate the amendments in each group in turn. Therefore, there will be three separate debates during the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

The first debate will be on amendment No 1, which deals with restricting the maximum number of commissioners that may be appointed.

The second debate will be on amendment Nos 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, which are listed in group 2. Those amendments relate to the appointment of a chief commissioner, responsibility for commission employees, and the commission's proceedings.

The final debate will be on amendment Nos 3, 4, 5 and 6, which are listed in group 3. Those amendments relate to the appointment of members and employees who have been convicted of a criminal offence.

I remind Members that they can speak in all of the debates. However, Members must address the subject matter of each debate.

Once the initial debate on each group has been completed, any subsequent amendments in the group will be moved formally as we debate the Bill, and the Question on each one will be put without further debate. The Questions on clauses to stand part of the Bill will be put at the appropriate points. Members will be aware that certain matters relating to the appointment of the commissioners designate are before the High Court and are, therefore, sub judice. I encourage Members to bear Standing Order 68 in mind during the debate on that item of business. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland)

Clause 2 (Short title)

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 1 and 2. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group those clauses for the Question on stand part.

Question put, That clauses 1 and 2 stand part of the Bill.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 49; Noes 16.

AYES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr G Kelly, Ms J McCann, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mrs M Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Dallat, Dr Deeny, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr Neeson, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Dr Farry and Mr McCarthy.

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

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Burnside, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr Savage.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1 (The Schedule to the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as substituted)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. Group 1 contains a single amendment, amendment No 1, which restricts the number of commissioners that can be appointed to a maximum of four.

Mrs Long: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 2, line 28, leave out “such members as are” and insert “not more than four members”.

I welcome the opportunity to have this debate, which has been denied us on a number of occasions. This must be the longest acceleration period that anyone has ever seen.

The clear will of the Assembly, on the basis of the vote at the Second Stage and today, is that there should be a commission, and that is important. Therefore, the amendments that my party is proposing, and the amendment that I am proposing, are intended to make the commission as workable as possible. For many of us, it is fairly clear that, despite the protestations of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that appointing four commissioners was a strategic and well-thought-through decision, that is not the case. Clearly, it was an uneasy political compromise. However the decision came about, it is incumbent on us all to make it work.

Amendment No 1 caps the number of commissioners at four. The argument has been made that this is a large piece of work, and that it therefore requires a number of commissioners to undertake it. I do not accept that argument, because we all realised before this process began that it was a large piece of work. At that stage, too, we all agreed that a single person was capable of taking the matter forward.

However, we now have four commissioners designate, and, although the Alliance Party's preference is for a single commissioner, given that four people have, in good faith, stepped forward to take this process forward, it would be unfair to create confusion about their standing. The Alliance Party's amendment, therefore, caps the number of commissioners at four — simply four because there are currently four.

I hope that, at some point in the future, we will be able to reduce the number of commissioners to one, as originally envisaged. Having one commissioner would create the strong, clear voice for victims that an advocacy role requires. Furthermore, to appoint a single Victims' Commissioner would ensure that the commission did not simply grow and grow, taking valuable resources from those who most need them, namely the victims.

With the creation of a commission of four, I can see no logical argument for anyone to oppose a cap at four. If four commissioners are sufficient for this first stage of the process to break the back of this difficult area, then, signpost the available services, alert the relevant Departments to any gaps in services and undertake the three or four years' advocacy work that this first commission will do, I see no logical argument for there ever being a need for more than four commissioners.

It is important for the victims' confidence that unwieldy mechanisms are not created. Placing a cap on numbers ensures that the maximum number of commissioners that we have now will be the maximum for the duration; that no resources are directed towards commissioners rather than the needs of victims; and that common sense is brought to bear on what has been an unpalatable process.

The argument for having four commissioners is clear-cut. There is no reason why anyone should

oppose that argument, and I hope that Members will give it due consideration.

Mr Shannon: I want to support — sorry, to speak on, and to oppose, amendment No 1. *[Laughter.]*

The DUP holds the issue of victims in the highest regard, and that has been made clear by the attention that victims have been given since the DUP became the largest party in the Province. The needs of victims have been discussed and addressed in a way that was not seen under any previous governmental structure. That is because this issue has always been a priority for my party. During our short time in Government, £36 million has been allocated to the sector — more than double the budgetary allocation for victims under the previous devolved Government.

I do not quote those facts to praise the DUP; I quote them to clarify, from the outset, where our hearts and loyalties lie and to illustrate that the Bill must pass in order to address properly the issues that victims have faced alone for many years. The Bill is progressing quicker than it has done for umpteen years — a certain party sat on its backside and did nothing.

It is vital to ensure that the framework is correct and in place as a matter of urgency in order to deliver for victims now and in the future. For too many years, victims in our Province have struggled, with little support. Their needs should have been addressed years ago, and the Assembly must now put an end to their struggles.

I have no desire to play political football with the issue of victims; I have the utmost depth of respect and sympathy for victims and want to display that sentiment in a tangible way. The majority of people in the Province want to support those who lost loved ones to terrorism during the Troubles. Although I welcome the fact that the media has highlighted the importance of the victims issue, we must be sensitive to the feelings of those who deal with loss every day and every night. I do not want to argue and debate this issue constantly yet make no real progress; I want structures to be established to allow the Assembly to offer sensitive support to those who need it most.

Some victims remain financially burdened by losses sustained during the Troubles. Some victims' families paid for their children to go to university or college and, as a result, had to bear a huge financial burden. Some single-parent families still pay mortgages, loans and university loans. Those families have great needs, and, thanks to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Assembly can now establish the mechanisms to begin to address those needs. For too many years, people have hummed and hawed and achieved nothing. That must end now.

After careful consideration, I reject amendment No 1; there is no intention — as the scaremongers purport — to increase the number of full-time commissioners

to five, six or seven. However, the Bill will allow for the flexibility to increase the number of part-time commissioners, if necessary, in the future. The needs of the victims' commission will, inevitably, change over time. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) are examples of the benefit of employing part-time commissioners to focus on specific issues but remain under one control. I am not saying that, in a few years' time, we will have four part-time commissioners or one full-time commissioner. However, if that mode is workable, why would we legislate to prevent such flexibility in the Bill? It is beyond me and many others in the Chamber. It is impractical to tie ourselves closely into a measure that could restrict future benefits.

Although I oppose amendment No 1, I draw attention to the fact that amendment No 8 allows a team of part-time commissioners with individual responsibilities to support a proposed chief commissioner. That could be a way of ensuring greater efficiency.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not stray from debating amendment No 1.

Mr Shannon: Mr Speaker, thank you for your graciousness; as always, you are very kind. I want to illustrate the importance of the overlap between the two amendments. These illustrations and examples are not matters of fact. They are not *faits accomplis*; they are mere possibilities, the benefits of which will be excluded if the Bill restricts the number of commissioners. If we impose a restriction on the number of commissioners and, at some stage in the future, we decide that part-time commissioners are required, we will again have to amend the legislation at further cost.

I see no benefit in limiting the commission's scope, given that there is no desire to have an unlimited number of full-time commissioners. We want only to ensure that there are enough commissioners to get the job done properly.

11.00 am

Some Members wish to use this issue as a point-scoring exercise. I urge those Members to make their points elsewhere. This is not simply a matter of money; it is an issue of the heart. It is about our desire to do our duty for victims and survivors. The Bill will bring into existence that which should have been brought about a long time ago. I ask those Members to please not withhold what is needed simply to win an argument.

The DUP has no desire to argue about this matter; it does, however, wish to put in place the structure that will provide help for victims and survivors, whether that is achieved by having one full-time commissioner and four part-time commissioners, or two full-time and three part-time commissioners. The Assembly must put that structure in place today without the need for

further debate next year or the year after. We must resolve this issue now and do what is right for the victims in the Province. I oppose amendment No 1.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I oppose amendment No 1. This is an important moment in the passage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. As Mr Shannon said, the Bill must have the flexibility to ensure that victims are recognised. We must put in place a mechanism that will allow every aspect of the matter to be covered as we move into a changing situation. At present, victims and survivors have particular needs, and it is important, after 10 years of trying to introduce legislation for a commission, that we move swiftly towards that goal. We must not allow the blocking tactics that are, unfortunately, being used again this morning to try to impede the passage of the Bill.

It is important to properly recognise and address the urgent needs of victims and survivors and their families. We have an opportunity to appoint four commissioners and give them the maximum ability to carry out that work. However, they require the flexibility that will allow them to cope with the changing situation in the coming years and to help to improve the lives of victims and survivors and their families. I oppose amendment No 1, because we must build future flexibility into the Bill. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Burnside: I support amendment No 1. The process that the Bill has gone through should be considered at best a major embarrassment to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). By initially fudging a decision on a single commissioner, that Department has stumbled from one mess-up to another. First, it pushed a crucial piece of legislation through the Assembly by accelerated passage, the reasons for which we have heard. Secondly, by pulling the Bill twice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has not shown proper respect to victims. After all that, the junior Minister the Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson can come up with only two amendments, in the wake of a great deal of talking by OFMDFM, to the effect that it wanted to achieve consensus and improve the Bill.

Nevertheless, I am glad that the Bill has now been brought to the Assembly for its Consideration Stage, and I hope that all Members are of the same opinion. The people of Northern Ireland suffered 40 years of the cruel terrorism that created thousands of innocent victims. It is therefore right and necessary that we address the needs of those innocent people who were physically and mentally scarred. The commission for victims and survivors will, it is to be hoped, help individuals and families who have suffered up to now in almost virtual silence. I hope that it will help us to move on and put our violent and troubled past behind us.

Several parties have tabled amendments today with the aim of improving the legislation. Although all the amendments have been tabled with the best of intentions, amendment No 1, which is supported by the Ulster Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and the SDLP, is a logical step to restrain the activities of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. If the Assembly does not support amendment No 1, there is a possibility that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister — having fudged the decision on having one commissioner by appointing four commissioners — could decide to appoint a fifth commissioner. If the Assembly supports amendment No 1, it will be restricting the number of commissioners to four.

There has been prevarication on the issue. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister moved from one commissioner to four by Executive action. Therefore, amendment No 1, which is a tidying up measure to cap the number of commissioners to four, must be supported by the Assembly as that will ensure that the structure of the commission is set in legislation and cannot be altered by further changes in opinion by the DUP or Sinn Féin. Amendment No 1 will have ramifications for subsequent amendments, therefore, I ask the House to support it.

Mrs D Kelly: Let us reflect on the past year and on the appointment of a Victims' Commissioner. The post of Victims' Commissioner was advertised and interviews were held twice last year, both before and after devolution. Before the summer recess last year, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister assured the House that a Victims' Commissioner would be appointed before the summer recess.

As late as December 2007, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and all Members were informed that the appointment of a Victims' Commissioner was still on the cards. It was not until the end of the year that four commissioners designate were appointed suddenly. We were told about that in a press statement by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. We have yet to hear a clear rationale — although we suspect the true rationale — for having four commissioners. However, that being the case, the SDLP is prepared to work with the premise of having four commissioners and no more.

We can already see the cost of having four full-time commissioners, who are paid £65,000 each, and their secretariat — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mrs D Kelly: It appears that the truth hurts. That money will be taken directly from the pockets of the victims that the Members opposite so loudly proclaim that that want to work for. That money could be spent on delivering services. A year later, we are still

debating this issue, despite accelerated passage. Had the Committee been allowed to do its job, we might have overcome some of the problems — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Every Member will have an opportunity to speak.

Mrs D Kelly: Just to inform some Members who do not seem to know; the Saville Inquiry is not being paid for out of the Northern Ireland block grant, unlike the victims' commission. One wonders what truth and justice really costs.

Some Members on the Benches opposite have said that they do not want to turn the issue of victims into a political football. Who created that political football? However, it seems that the DUP and Sinn Féin have scored an own goal through their collective failure to reach a consensus and a decision on the way forward. Several of the amendments proposed by those parties are nothing but a cover to spare their blushes in having for the third time — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: The Member must stick to discussing amendment No 1.

Mrs D Kelly: I was dealing with the points overall, Mr Speaker.

Some Members have said that our party did nothing much. What we certainly did not do was to create any victims, and we did our best to ensure that there was political stability, unlike Sinn Féin and the DUP who, until last year, created nothing but political instability — and worse in some cases. Our party has done much to drive the issue forward and to put victims and survivors on the political agenda during direct rule.

We are prepared to accept four commissioners, but the figure should be capped at four. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister have not yet explained clearly why there should be four commissioners. We certainly do not want any more than four.

Mr Durkan: Amendment No 1 attempts to make sense of the situation that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have created. Unable to deliver a single commissioner, they have produced four commissioners and, thereby, a commission. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister want the Assembly to accept a four-member commission. If that is to happen, surely it is reasonable for the Assembly to insist that it be capped at four commissioners. The amendment is not an attempt to wreck or block anything but an attempt to keep some sense of reasoned perspective.

Mr Shannon said that those Members who oppose amendment No 1 do not plan to have more than four commissioners but may want to have more, and that they may want to have part-time commissioners. A system in which a chief commissioner were supported by part-time commissioners, in addition to the other

commissioners, would make a complete nonsense of the arguments that we heard from those proposing the Bill over the past number of weeks. They claimed that there could not be a chief commissioner, and that there had to be four equal commissioners in order to prevent a hierarchy of commissioners and, as a result, a hierarchy of victims. Now we are told that there may be an even larger hierarchy of commissioners and part-time commissioners. There has been no clear or consistent thinking by the parties who introduced the Bill. The debate on amendment No 1 is aimed at flushing out that lack of thought.

Mr Shannon highlighted a number of very important issues and problems that victims face. However, he did not say what the Bill would do to solve any of those problems. The Bill has been drawn so narrowly that the commission, and its commissioners, will not have the necessary powers to take on and investigate such cases. The Minister of Finance and Personnel — from a sedentary position — compared the commission for victims and survivors with the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. Those bodies have chief commissioners and multiple commissioners. However, they also have very clear functions, and the Paris principles grant them the powers, as state-created bodies, to deal with human rights issues.

The commission for victims and survivors is absolutely bereft of such powers. Therefore, Mr Shannon's reference to specific issues faced by victims is somewhat hollow; the Bill will neither address nor ameliorate those problems. Francie Molloy said that people want to see various issues dealt with, and dealt with in a proper way. However, nothing in the Bill tells us how things will be dealt with, or dealt with in a proper way. We have been made aware of the possibility of more commissioners, or part-time commissioners, but not of any substantive action or interventions. In this short debate on amendment No 1, we have also heard about the budget for victims. However, we have not been told what say or sway the commission, or commissioners, will have in spending that budget or in the victims' strategy.

I must correct the impression that has been given that no one else ever did anything for victims. In the previous period of devolution, the victims' strategy was produced and consulted on, yet others heckled and opposed it on the grounds of the definition of a victim. They did not get behind that work, preferring to try to get in the way of its progress. Similarly, the victims unit was set up in the devolved context, even though the Northern Ireland Office claimed that victims' issues lay with it. We pushed the very concept of a victims' and survivors' forum, only to meet with resistance from other parties who did not seem to have the care or consideration for victims then that they plead now.

Why can the parties who ask the rest of us to accept four commissioners not accept a cap on four commissioners? Such a cap would ensure that resources were not consumed by the commission but, as far as possible, reached victims, improving their circumstances and meeting their needs.

11.15 am

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson): I welcome the opportunity to address the issues that have been raised during the debate on amendment No 1, which was tabled by the Alliance Party.

Naomi Long, a Member for East Belfast, talked about the need for a cap on the number of commissioners and, in particular, she referred to resources and said how important it was to restrict the amount of money that will be spent on running the commission. It is unfortunate that she made no mention of the fact that we recently announced in the Budget a record £36 million for the victims' sector. None of the parties that oppose the establishment of a victims' commission acknowledges that, because it does not suit them. They are interested only in scoring cheap political points on an issue that should be above that.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member tell us what the role of the commission will be in respect of its budget? Members have asked that question on several occasions, and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has failed to answer. What say will the Commission have in the budget?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The Member for Foyle referred earlier to the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which was made at Westminster. He should take the time to read that again, and he will see that those matters are already spelled out in that legislation. There is no need for us to replicate those provisions in this Bill, the sole purpose of which is to establish a victims' commission.

Mr P Robinson: The passion that has been shown from the opposition Benches is synthetic. If the Members opposite feel so passionately about this issue, they would have tabled an amendment to the Order as it passed through Westminster. They had every right to do so — why did they not?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): That question begs an answer, although I suspect that we will not get one.

The Bill deals with the establishment of the commission. The funding, and how it will be spent, will be addressed in the draft victims' strategy, which will be published soon, and on which there will be consultation. The roles of the commission, the forum for victims and survivors, and the victims' sector generally, will then become clear. This Bill will enable

us to proceed with the appointment of the commission. It is not intended to be a catch-all Bill that addresses a wide range of issues.

My friend Mr Shannon, a Member for Strangford, rightly made the case against amendment No 1 by saying that the Bill must provide flexibility for the future. No one suggests that the commission's work will be the same in five years' time. The commission will evolve to meet the changing needs of victims and survivors.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister made it clear, when they announced their intention to appoint four commissioners, that there was too much work to place on the shoulders of one individual. The commission has to catch up on years of neglect of the victims' sector. That is why four commissioners are to be appointed. The work is important, difficult and challenging.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The junior Minister has the Floor.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The First Minister and deputy First Minister rightly concluded that that work required more than one commissioner. That is why a commission should be appointed. I do not understand why parties that are opposed to a commission do not see the need to increase the priority that is accorded to the victims' sector.

The agenda for victims is as deserving as the equality agenda and the human rights agenda, and that is why we should have a full commission. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. As I have already said, every Member will have an opportunity to speak. Please allow the Minister to respond.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): OFMDFM makes no apology for establishing a proper commission for dealing with that issue, and for appointing four people to take on the very burdensome responsibility of addressing the long-neglected needs of victims and survivors. I suspect that those who cry loudest have more to hide when it comes to their failure, when they were in power, to address adequately the needs of victims.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Mr Burnside said the process of the Bill to date has been a major embarrassment to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and that it was one mess after another. I am sorry, I cannot agree with Mr Burnside on that.

When Mr Burnside's party was in power it failed miserably to address the needs of victims. In 1998, it supported an agreement that failed miserably to deal with the needs of victims and survivors. We are now clearing up the mess made by the previous Executive — not the present one — and we will continue to do that. We believe — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Order.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): For that reason, the work of this Commission is important and that is why amendment No 1 must be opposed. In time, the needs of the victims' sector may change. I am not sure what direction those will take —

Mr Ford: Hallelujah. I am grateful to the junior Minister for finally giving way. Furthermore, I am grateful that he has recognised that the needs of victims may change in the future.

If Mr Donaldson is taking the view of his colleague Mr Shannon regarding flexibility — and indeed the same view is taken by Mr Molloy, which is interesting from his perspective — why has Mr Donaldson not tabled an amendment to address the issue of a potential future full-time commissioner and part-time assistant commissioners, rather than failing to address that, even in his own amendment No 8?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): If the Member for South Antrim Mr Ford were to take time to read amendment No 8 —

Mr Ford: I have.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): If he were to take time to read amendment No 8 he would see that we have made provision for the future appointment of a chief commissioner. OFMDFM believes there is a need to retain flexibility. The role of the commission will evolve in response to the changing needs of victims and survivors. When and if this occurs, flexibility in the Bill is required to change the modalities of that commission to reflect the changing nature of its work.

As Mr Shannon rightly pointed out, flexibility is needed if, in future, we change from having four full-time commissioners to a model similar to that of the Equality Commission or the Human Rights Commission; with a full-time chief commissioner and some part-time commissioners. That may not be the case; however, OFMDFM does not anticipate that it will be necessary at any point in the future to appoint more than four full-time commissioners. However, legislation should give sufficient flexibility to allow for possible future reshaping of the commission.

Over the next years, the needs of victims and survivors will change and the new structures of support will develop. The legislation is drafted in a way that gives the flexibility to move away, if necessary, from the model of four, full-time commissioners. For example, the legislation as drafted allows for the possibility of a future commission made up of part-time, rather than full-time, commissioners with part-time remuneration, should that be required to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

Paragraph 3(1) of schedule 1 to the Bill provides that:

“The commission shall consist of such members as are appointed by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly.”

Amendment No 1 restricts the number of commissioners to a maximum of four. Therefore OFMDFM does not consider such an amendment to be either necessary or in the best interests of victims and survivors. For those reasons I call upon Members to reject amendment No 1.

Mrs Long: Both parties that have supported OFMDFM — first when they told us that the Bill required no amendments and now when they decide that it does — have been very quick to lecture this Assembly that the Bill should not be used as a political football.

We have been told that the issue is sensitive — as though those of us who wish to amend the Bill neither know nor care about that. However it is the members of those parties who are barracking and heckling those who are trying to have a reasoned discussion about these sensitive issues. It, therefore, ill behoves them to lecture others on sensitivity when they do not show any themselves.

Jim Shannon highlighted the needs of victims: we are all aware of those needs. Indeed, they are the reason why we have tabled amendments to the Bill. We are attempting to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear and make a fundamentally flawed Bill, at least, workable. He also said that the Bill has been dealt with in a way that has not been seen under any other Administration. I agree; but that is not something of which the Administration should be proud.

Jim Shannon also said that the matter should be dealt with urgently so that the structures can be put in place. Capping the permitted number of commissioners at four will not slow down the passage of the Bill one iota, and it is a nonsense to suggest otherwise. He also, rightly, highlighted the ongoing financial and emotional burden on families who have become victims during the process. The money that could be spent on them is, instead, being spent on a growing commission. That expenditure is unreasonably high, and we want to ensure that it does not get any higher.

A number of Members raised the issue of part-time commissioners. Such appointments can still happen. The only flexibility that will be removed if amendment No 1 is passed will be the ability to have more than four commissioners. There will be an opportunity to have two full-time and two part-time commissioners or one full-time and three part-time commissioners. There is plenty of room for flexibility within the arrangement of four commissioners, but no one has yet suggested a coherent argument as to why there will be a need for more than four. That is why we have tabled the amendment.

Jim Shannon originally said that it was no one's intention to have more than four commissioners, but he went on to describe a number of arrangements whereby there would have been five. He also said that

he did not want the issue to become a point-scoring exercise, and I agree with him. However, he said that we should bring our arguments to another place. This is the place for legislation to be made and debate to be had. There is no other place for the debate on the amendments to take place; this is the appropriate place for that to happen. I see no reason why we should not be having that debate now. We could have had it a month ago, but we are having it now, and this is the right place to conduct that debate. It is not about making a political football; it is about making legislation.

Francie Molloy, unwisely, referred to blocking tactics. Considering that Sinn Féin blocked the progression of the legislation on the previous two occasions on which it was to be debated, it would have been better for Mr Molloy had he not raised that argument. The proposers of the amendments have not delayed anything for the past month; we were ready to come into the Chamber to debate the amendments, as we are today.

Mr Molloy also spoke about the need to move speedily. The Members who tabled the amendments have not caused the delay, and it is incumbent on those who caused the delay not to point the finger at others for merely doing their duty.

I agree with David Burnside; the amendment does not limit flexibility. A range of permutations comprising full-time and part-time commissioners is permissible under amendment No 1. Likewise, one commissioner would be permitted under the amendment if OFMDFM were capable of getting its act together to appoint a single person.

Dolores Kelly was right: even the current Administration accepted that one commissioner was sufficient when they re-advertised for a commissioner. They did not think that four commissioners were required when that re-advertisement was placed. Perhaps they came up with the notion for four over the much-talked-about dinner at Christmas. However, it has been unpalatable for the rest of us.

Mark Durkan accurately exposed the grubby compromise. Arguments that have been made in the Chamber have frequently exposed that compromise. Those arguments were neither coherent nor well thought through, much like the commission that OFMDFM has been trying to create.

11.30 am

Jeffrey Donaldson mentioned a sum of £36 million for the victims' sector. He then explained that that budget is not relevant to today's debate because this debate is about the creation of a commission, and the matter of expenditure and budget will be addressed in the draft victims' strategy, which will be put out for consultation. Mr Speaker, I took your advice and stuck to the substance of the amendment. However, the issue

of finance has been raised, so it is important that I respond. I want to make it clear that no one has downplayed the amount of money that has been set aside for victims. Nor have I questioned the commitment of those in OFMDFM to see this legislation through, although others have questioned mine. However, I want as much of that money as is physically possible to go directly towards meeting the needs of victims, rather than being subsumed by bureaucracy.

Mr Donaldson also said that amendment No 1 would prevent the commission from evolving. No one has an issue with the commission's evolving; however, I have a problem with its growing and expanding. The importance of any structure is not increased simply by siphoning off money to pay for its additional bureaucracy.

The commission's work is important. However, that importance will be measured not by the number of commissioners but by the quality of the commission's output. Four commissioners is three too many, but it is what we are left with. I simply want to ensure that we do not end up with more than four. Amendment No 1 restricts in no shape or form the commission's ability to function.

The number of four was selected for no other reason than to cover OFMDFM's embarrassment about its inability to agree on one commissioner. That is not a coherent argument for proceeding with this arrangement, and it is certainly not the case that I will accept reassurances —

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Long: No, I will not give way.

I will not accept reassurances from persons in OFMDFM that they do not wish to further expand the commission. They have said on previous occasions —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mrs Long: They said on previous occasions that they would appoint one —

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Long: I will give way.

Mr P Robinson: The Member makes what she believes to be a very strong case for having no more than four commissioners. Will she join us in supporting legislation to reduce to four the number of commissioners on the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission?

Mrs Long: When the legislation proposing the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission was introduced, it proposed a much better-structured arrangement than the one with which we are currently dealing. The reason that some Members want to allow the commission flexibility to evolve is because they

are completely unclear as to the nature of the beast that they have created. That is the fundamental difference between the proposed commission for victims and survivors and those two commissions.

As other Members have suggested, if the proposed commission were to have the same role and remit as those two commissions, there might be an argument for having a larger commission for victims and survivors. However, that is not the case. It is anticipated that the proposed commission will have an advocacy role, and that role is clearly set out. As I have said, the value of the commission's work cannot be calculated based on the number of commissioners that it has — it will entirely depend on what is delivered. Capping the number of commissioners at four will prevent nothing but a further drain on scarce resources. I ask Members to support the amendment.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 32; Noes 55.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Burnside, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Dr Deeny, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Neeson, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

11.45 pm

Mr Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments, beginning with amendment No 2, with which it will be convenient to debate the remaining six amendments in the group. The amendments in this group deal with the appointment of a chief commissioner and with the proceedings of the commission.

I advise members that amendment No 7 is consequential to amendment No 2. Therefore, if amendment No 2 is not made, I will not call amendment No 7.

Amendment No 8 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 2. Therefore, if amendment No 2 is made, I will not call amendment No 8.

I also advise members that amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11 are mutually exclusive with amendment No 8. Therefore, if amendment No 8 is made, I will not call amendment Nos 9, 10 or 11.

In the event that amendment No 8 is not made, I advise Members that amendment Nos 9 and 11 both relate to the requirement for unanimous decision-making by the Commission. Therefore, amendment Nos 9 and 11 are mutually exclusive.

Additionally, amendment Nos 10 and 11 relate to the removal of the same sub-paragraph in schedule 1 and are also mutually exclusive. Therefore, I will call amendment No 11 only if amendment Nos 8, 9 and 10 are not made.

I call Mrs Dolores Kelly to move amendment No 2 and to explain the other amendments in this group.

Mrs D Kelly: I beg to move amendment No 2: In page 2, line 29, at end insert

“() the First Minister and the deputy First Minister acting jointly shall appoint one of the members as Chief Commissioner.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 7: In page 3, line 40, at end insert

“(6A) All employees of the Commission shall be subject to the direction of the Chief Commissioner”. — [*Mrs Long.*]

No 8: In page 4, line 30, leave out paragraph 9 and insert

“9.—(1) The Commission may by standing orders make such provision as it thinks fit to regulate its own proceedings (including quorum).

(2) Standing orders may be made or amended by the Commission only with the agreement of all the members who vote on the matter.

(3) Standing orders shall provide for a decision on any of the following matters to be taken by the Commission only with the agreement of all the members who vote on the matter—

- (a) the provision of financial assistance under Article 7(1);
- (b) the preparation and submission under Article 8 of—

- (i) a work programme;
- (ii) a revised work programme; or
- (iii) an amendment to an existing work programme.

(4) Standing orders shall provide for a decision on any other matter to be taken by the Commission on a simple majority of the members who vote on the matter.

(5) In making representations or recommendations under Article 7(4) in connection with a review under Article 6(2), the Commission shall in relation to each representation or recommendation specify whether it is made—

(a) with the agreement of all the members who voted on the matter; or

(b) on a simple majority of the members who voted on the matter.

(6) The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly—

(a) shall keep under review the working arrangements of the Commission;

(b) may—

(i) designate a member as Chief Commissioner;

(ii) at any time revoke that designation;

(c) may give directions to the Commission regulating its procedure (including directions supplementing or amending any standing orders of the Commission).” — [*The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson).*]

No 9: In page 4, line 33, leave out from “by” to end of line 33 and insert

“by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members”. — [*Mr Ford.*]

No 10: In page 4, line 34, leave out sub-paragraph (3). — [*Mr Ford.*]

No 11: In page 4, line 34, leave out sub-paragraph (3) and insert

“(3) Where a proposal to make or amend standing orders is not agreed unanimously by the members of the Commission, the Commission may, after further consideration refer such proposed standing orders or such proposed amendments to standing orders, if endorsed by a majority of Commissioners, to the First Minister and deputy First Minister with the recommendation that they, acting jointly, approve them on grounds of sufficient consensus.” — [*Mrs D Kelly.*]

No 12: In page 4, line 39, leave out from “or” to end of line 40. — [*Mrs Long, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Ford.*]

Mr Speaker, you are the leader of the House, and you have deputies, thereby illustrating that any organisation requires a leader to at least call order and to give direction. The same applies to the victims’ commission: there ought to be a recognisable leader of the commission — a chief commissioner — to give direction not only to his or her fellow commissioners, but to be responsible for the secretariat and to give an accountability mechanism to the wider community.

The manner in which the commission conducts its business will signal one of two things: either we will continue to address victims’ issues in a fragmented,

divided and factional manner, or we will invest in a new beginning where we attempt to heal the wounds of our people and to move our society forward together. The SDLP is committed to the latter and has therefore tabled its amendments in that spirit.

There is a clear need for the commission’s work to have a collective and consensus-building approach. The amendments that refer to collective working under the guidance of a chief commissioner are designed to help ensure that we achieve that. Leadership on the basis of consensus will be central to the achievement of a cohesive approach that can inspire public confidence.

As regards decision-making, I acknowledge that the Alliance Party’s amendments are similar to those of the SDLP. However, the SDLP’s amendment No 11 is simply a more effective means of achieving an end that is similar to that required by the Alliance Party.

Collective working and consensus-based decision-making should not be an optional approach, as signalled by OFMDFM’s amendment No 8. A clear signal must be sent about the type of outcomes that we desire. It is clear to anyone who reads OFMDFM’s amendment that it is an attempt to appease the DUP Back-Benchers and that it is a DUP fig leaf as regards the victims’ commission. Members will notice the subtlety of the word “may” in some key points in that amendment. A chief commissioner “may” be appointed, and directions “may” be given, rather than “shall”. In the past, the DUP indicated that it might support the other amendments. However, it has had to back-pedal on that.

That is unacceptable because the amendments that have been tabled by Mrs Long, Mr Ford and I would have provided a clear structure and format, and a better outworking for the victims’ commission — not only for that commission and its organisation, but for other groups that must work with it. It is unfair and unacceptable that victims’ interests remain prejudiced by the lack of consensus and failure of leadership in OFMDFM.

There is still an opportunity to give the victims’ commissioners designate a framework within which they can work more effectively to create a future for victims and survivors of which we can all feel proud. I do not know how many other commissioners are able to set their own policy framework and their own terms of reference. That key piece of work and responsibility should have fallen on the shoulders of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, not those of the commissioners designate.

Earlier, junior Minister Jeffrey Donaldson and some of his colleagues, speaking to amendment No 1, compared the victims’ commission to the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission in respect of the numbers of commissioners. Since we are dealing with the proceedings of the commission, I contend that the sincerity of that comparison is

challenged by his and his colleagues' failure to propose any similar powers of investigation for the victims' commission, as our disallowed amendments would. They would give the commission clear, real, legal authority, with powers to sanction when needed, and to search the darkest corners when required. Are we to believe or accept that victims and survivors are not entitled to internationally defined rights? Without the inclusion of those principles, the commissioners' ability to make a difference will be limited.

It is also surprising that Sinn Féin has not embraced the need for the inclusion of the Paris Principles in the legislation. That party's failure to do so highlights serious questions about its attitudes towards victims and survivors in particular, and its weak approach to dealing with the DUP in general. Those issues must be dealt with and clarified quickly. I support the amendments.

Mr Spratt: I am glad that the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill is before us today, and that we also have before us a number of amendments from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which, if passed by the House, will bring about positive changes to the proposed Bill. In weeks gone by, we witnessed what could almost have been described as gloating by some Members — those who repeatedly seek to undermine efforts to bring about positive changes in Northern Ireland, for no other reason than opposition for opposition's sake, and cheap politicking.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Does the Member agree that the problem for some of the parties is that they do not know whether they are in Government or in opposition? This Bill came from the Government.

Mr Spratt: I entirely agree. Some Members believe that they are in opposition, but they are a very weak opposition.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: The Member will have an opportunity to speak soon. I will not give way. I wish to deal with the second group of amendments, which relate to a chief commissioner and to the proceedings of the commission. I support amendment No 8, as tabled by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I oppose amendment Nos 2, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12.

First, I wish to deal with the provision in amendment No 8 for appointing a chief commissioner in the future. I am speaking of the future, and it is my belief that amendment No 8 — unlike amendment No 2, tabled by Mrs Long, Mrs Kelly and Mr Ford — puts in place the required flexibility for the future for the designation of a chief commissioner, whether that person is appointed from the current appointees or from any future appointees to the commission. That is a sensible approach.

The legislation must be framed to deal with the current situation, and with future circumstances. I fear

that that is a recurring failure in the amendments that have been tabled by members of the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party.

Furthermore, amendment No 8 improves the Bill through the standing orders that regulate the decision-making process of the commission, by allowing a decision to be made by a:

“simple majority of the members who vote on the matter.”

The amendment also provides that certain decisions, specifically those detailed in paragraph 9(3), must be taken:

“only with the agreement of all the members who vote on the matter.”

To increase the transparency of decision-making, paragraph 9(5) will ensure that the commission specifies the strength of support that a report or recommendation received from its membership. Such openness is welcome and refreshing, and it should command the support of the House.

Finally, paragraph 9(6) legislates to keep the working arrangements of the commission under review. That important provision again demonstrates the foresight of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. As time goes by, improvements may be made to the mechanisms by which the commission operates. As those will have a positive impact on the delivery of services to victims, the Bill should allow for such eventualities.

Amendment No 8 provides the best way forward in dealing with matters relating to a chief commissioner and the proceedings of the commission. Therefore, the DUP will oppose all other amendments in the second grouping. I urge Members from other parties to consider the positive elements of the amendment tabled by OFMDFM, and I hope that they will identify it as the best way to progress.

Let us not forget that the establishment of a victims' commission represents an extremely significant step for Northern Ireland. After years of neglect under direct rule and the previous Administration headed by the UUP and the SDLP, there is now a mechanism by which the Province's victims will be served effectively. Backed up by the £36 million that my colleague Peter Robinson allocated to the victims' sector in the recent Budget, the effective strategy will help those who need it now and in the future.

Any delay in the Bill is worthwhile, if it improves its effectiveness — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. Every other Member will have an opportunity to speak to whichever amendments they choose.

Mr Spratt: The delay produced improvements and made the Bill a more effective framework for the

future. The DUP has long placed the needs of victims at the top of the political agenda, and the Bill signifies the delivery of its pledges.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I support amendment No 8, and I oppose amendment Nos 2, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12. For the past few weeks, some parties have been calling for amendments to address the issues that they raised during various debates and discussions — and amendment No 8 does so comprehensively.

Dolores Kelly raised a concern about the amendment's use of "may" and "shall". I point out to her that the amendment contains three instances of "may" and two of "shall". Therefore, it provides clear direction on what the commission is required to do.

Mrs D Kelly: My concern is about where the words appear; not how many times. Amendment No 8 states that the First Minister and deputy First Minister "may" give directions to the Commission and "may" designate a member as a chief commissioner. That is nonsense, and the SDLP is not so foolish as to have missed that.

Mr Molloy: So far, most of the SDLP's amendments have been nonsense, which is part of the problem. The Member would be better to deal with victims' issues, rather than playing party politics. It is one thing to stand in the Chamber and oppose everything that is being done to progress the legislation: it is another thing to go out and talk to victims and promise them the sun, the moon and the stars. The Member and her party have been doing that for years, but they have done nothing to resolve the situation.

It is time for Members to deal sensitively and sensibly with the issues that are before them and to move forward with amendment No 8, which leaves a certain amount of flexibility rather than tying everyone down. Why must the SDLP tie us all down to crossing all the t's and dotting all the i's in accordance with that party's thinking?

12.00 noon

The legislation should be flexible enough to allow victims and survivors — not the commission or the parties — to take the lead and decide the next step forward. Amendment No 8 makes provision for the families to do that. It is important that we introduce this legislation to support the commissioners and to give families the opportunity to design and move forward in the way that they want, at the speed that they want. There will be variations, and flexibility is needed to allow that to happen, rather than nailing everything down so that there cannot be any change.

The legislation would have been in place, and the current delay avoided, if weeks had not been spent dealing with SDLP delaying tactics involving trying to change one word in the Bill. I deliberately use the phrase

"delaying tactics" because the SDLP has been nit-picking parts of the legislation, instead of moving it forward.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member say what delaying tactic was created by my party, the Alliance Party or any other group? The Member's party, Sinn Féin, postponed previous proceedings that had been due to come before the House.

Mr Molloy: The delaying tactics that you, your party and others have used consist of nit-picking instead of taking a sensible, sensitive approach to moving forward and empowering the commissioners to do the job to which they were appointed.

Mrs Long: Will the Member accept that what he refers to as nit-picking, others may consider as paying a degree of attention to detail that was lacking in OFMDFM and in the Committee, when the Bill was being discussed?

Mr Molloy: You can describe it in whatever way you want. The reality is that the legislation has been delayed by discussions that have gone on for several weeks. Instead of having the —

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry, but can the Member please explain to the Assembly why the legislation was not brought forward on two separate occasions? The delay has not been caused by other Members but by his party and his party alone. It is pure prevarication from Sinn Féin.

Mr Speaker: Before Mr Molloy continues, I remind Members to address their remarks through the Chair, not directly to each other. Debate is conducted through the Chair.

Mr Molloy: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. Every Member will have the opportunity to speak and should use it, instead of interrupting me. That would avoid my having to jump up and down all the time. Members should concentrate on what they have to say and take their turn.

Today's objective is to move the Bill forward; to give technical and legislative support; to enable the commissioners designate to start dealing with victims in a comprehensive way.

The issues involved have been discussed for 10 years under direct rule and the previous Administration in an effort to make progress. Sometimes when we look for perfection we can finish up with nothing being achieved. Therefore, let us use what we have at the moment. Let us give the legislation our backing and move it on to the next stage so that survivors and victims' families can see some light at the end of the tunnel and start believing that they will have their say on how the legislation moves forward and on how victims are dealt with in the future.

It is time to focus on supporting the commission and enabling it to do its job of supporting families and victims.

Do not lose sight of the Bill's real purpose, which is to support victims and survivors. Let us give them the opportunity to have their say, through the Bill.

The commissioners for victims and survivors must be given a solid legislative footing that will allow them to get on with the work that they are waiting to do. The Assembly was made aware of a problem when a commissioner designate said that, because the posts did not have legislative support, they could not do the job for which they were appointed. Members of the House said they would ensure that that situation was rectified. There is an opportunity to do that now, and to move matters forward speedily. Let us get on with that job.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Alliance Party Members who tabled amendment Nos 2 and 7, which make logical and functional sense and will improve the commission's workings and outcomes for victims.

Amendment No 2 calls on the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to jointly appoint one of the members of the commission for victims and survivors as chief commissioner. In supporting the amendment, Members must ask: what is the purpose of the Bill? The answer is to continually provide the best possible support for victims — innocent victims — of atrocious acts of terrorism. There is a difference between those who some people define as victims, and innocent victims. Members must identify the best way in which society can deal with that issue.

In supporting the amendment, my party believes that it is proper that one person be identified as chief commissioner. That is consistent with other bodies, such as the Electoral Commission; the Equality Commission; the Independent Commission on Policing; the Parades Commission, and even, most recently, the post of Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. All of those bodies have one feature in common: they either have a chief officer or a chief commissioner. There is a good reason for that. The chief commissioner would be in a position to provide leadership and guidance to the body corporate — to the commission as a whole.

There is a danger that four individual commissioners will be perceived as representing four individual constituencies. Surely, that is not helpful. Who will argue for the innocent victims who do not pertain to any of those groupings? The answer is that a chief commissioner who has overall responsibility would be able to focus on those people.

If amendment No 2 is not accepted, the downside would be that the system would degenerate into a series of solo runs, whereby each victims' commissioner employs his or her own staff and looks after his or her own brand of victims. A message would

be sent out to society that the victims' commission is not concerned with trying to put the past behind us or redressing wrongs, but is merely a continuation of shoddy back-room deals within the cosy DUP/Sinn Féin coalition. That would not move society forward, but would condemn it to live in the past.

The proper way forward is to ensure that the Assembly comes together on this issue. While I deal with that issue, I want to refer to an earlier intervention by a Member who said that he was speaking on behalf of the Government. I want to place it on record that, as far as my party is aware, the Bill is not an Executive proposal. It is a proposal from the DUP/Sinn Féin axis. Although the rest of the Assembly may have been informed of the Bill, it has not been party to it.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Perhaps the Member should consult his colleagues who are Ministers. He would then understand the way in which the Government operate: a collective decision is taken on the principle of a Bill, and it is a matter for the sponsoring Department to take forward any amendments to that Bill. Therefore, we have made proposals on the Government's behalf, and not simply on behalf of a Department.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to be able to benefit from the Member's four weeks' experience as a junior Minister and his lecture on how the Government work. Just for the record, it was for information — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker, I am trying very hard —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr B McCrea: For the record, I am prepared to give way to Members if, instead of speaking from a sedentary position, they stand up and make an intervention. It appears that Mrs Robinson wants to make an intervention.

Mrs I Robinson: I am happy to make an intervention. It is a case of pot calling the kettle black — the Member makes frequent interventions from a sedentary position.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr B McCrea: I gather, from what the Member said during that intervention, that two wrongs make a right.

It is quite clear that this is not coming from the Government — it is coming from the DUP.

Mr Durkan: The rather evasive answer the junior Minister gave during his intervention was obviously aimed at masking the fact that proposed amendment No 8, which he said came from the Government, never went near the Executive or received their approval.

Mr B McCrea: That was an extremely useful intervention from the Member for Foyle. I reiterate my point: the proposed amendment does not come from the Government; it comes from the DUP/Sinn Féin cosy coalition.

The rest of us do not sign up to the amendment, because we were not involved in discussions about it. Earlier, Members urged others not to use the issue as a political football, but it is those who shout the loudest that have the most to fear.

This issue is like a runaway train. Indeed, it is an issue that will come back to haunt us because it has not been dealt with properly. We must find a way to ensure that society progresses, that we deal legitimately with people's concerns and that we look after the innocent victims who need our help and support. It is simply incoherent to say that someone would not support a victim; I cannot believe that that argument is being used.

We have aired our concerns about the Bill to try to make it better; that is why we support amendment Nos 2 and 7. There is no point in appointing a single, chief commissioner if the legislative back-up to ensure that that person is given some authority is not provided. To do otherwise would mean that that person would be simply a figurehead with responsibility and accountability but no authority.

I commend amendment Nos 2 and 7 to the House. I return to my earlier point: what is the point of the Bill? Why do we need a chief commissioner with the appropriate authority? It is to ensure that innocent victims are looked after. Secondary to that, it is to make sure that we can put the terrible past behind us. We have had 30 to 40 years of civil strife, with the most unimaginable atrocities carried out. One has to ask oneself: who is responsible for those atrocities? Who created most of those victims? How can they stand here and say that they want to make it better? That is not what the process is about.

Northern Ireland has to find a way to move forward; we have to find a way of dealing with the past. My vision is for an independent, chief commissioner who represents all victims in a fair, impartial and independent way, and who has the support of all Members of the House and the country. That is the only way forward.

Amendment No 8, which my colleague will deal with in more detail, is a great disappointment and a shoddy piece of work. It shows the Office of the First and deputy First Minister's lack of conviction in tackling the issue.

Three or four attempts have been made to bring the motion before the House, and they have failed because we have not properly engaged with the issue. The Ulster Unionist Party supports amendment Nos 2 and 7 and rejects outright amendment No 8 as a shoddy piece of back-room dealing.

12.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I share the Member's distaste for amendment No 8, which is tabled in the name of junior Minister Donaldson. Presumably, that amendment also carries the weight of junior Minister Kelly, who is in the House, and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I highlight my concern, and that of the Ulster Unionist Party, over the proposal under amendment No 8 to introduce sub-paragraph 4 to paragraph 9, which would read:

"Standing orders shall provide for a decision on any other matter to be taken by the Commission on a simple majority of the members who vote on the matter."

Does that not invite chaos and confusion and give at least one commissioner of any four an effective veto on any progress that a victims' commission would bring forward?

Mr B McCrea: Judging by the sharp intakes of breath from the DUP Benches, Mr Kennedy has hit the nail on the head. I have no doubt that the junior Minister will address those concerns when he makes his winding-up speech. I am interested to know whether the other junior Minister, whose name does not appear on the Order Paper, is prepared to speak on and support all of those amendments. In response to a point of order from Mr Burnside, the Speaker said that it was not necessary to have any more names on the Order Paper, but it would be nice to know whether a joint position was held by the two junior Ministers, given that the second junior Minister's party found difficulty in bringing earlier motions to the House.

It is a pity that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister lacked the strength of conviction to do initially what was right for the victims of Northern Ireland and appoint one suitable commissioner. If they had acted at that time, that commissioner would be helping all of those innocent victims by now; the work would be being done. As my colleague will outline, amendment No. 8, which was tabled by junior Minister Donaldson, does not do any justice to the points that I have made or the issues that I have raised. The innocent victims of the Troubles, who have suffered greatly, deserve more. We should be prepared to take courageous steps to deliver for them. Amendment Nos 2 and 7 strive to improve the Bill, and the Ulster Unionist Party and I support those amendments.

Mrs Long: I thank junior Minister Kelly for the briefing that he provided for me last Friday in my capacity as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

I speak as an Assembly Member and not as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, and I will consider the amendments in some detail. The Alliance Party's eyes remain fixed on the goal of creating a strong, clear and coherent voice for victims. As I have

said on many occasions, that goal would be best achieved by having a single commissioner. However, it is clearly the will of the majority of the House that that will be done through a commission. Therefore, we want to ensure that that commission can, as far as is practicable, create that same strong, coherent voice for victims.

When the Bill was brought forward, I raised a number of issues, for example that of the commissioners working in silos. I raised the issue of how the mechanisms and structures of the commission would facilitate the creation of that strong, clear and coherent voice. The Alliance Party amendments try to deal with the Bill's significant deficiencies.

First, we considered the structures of a victims' commission. For a commission, or indeed any organisation, to work, someone must take the lead.

A Committee requires a Chairperson in order to operate, an Assembly requires a Speaker, a party requires a leader and, if it is to operate and function properly, a commission requires a chief commissioner. That is neither unusual nor strange — in fact, it is the norm. Therefore, in amendment No 2, we have attempted to place the onus on OFMDFM to appoint jointly one of the commissioners as chief commissioner. That would not undermine, devalue or negate the right of any of the other commissioners to express a view — whether that be a majority or minority opinion — nor would it affect their role in dealing face to face with the people who require their assistance. Instead, that arrangement would create coherence in the commission, and roles and responsibilities would be clear to people who wished to contact it.

Furthermore — and crucially — a secretariat that would answer directly to the chief commissioner should be established. Consequently, a situation in which four commissioners each had their own secretariat, worked in silos and became detached from one another — all of which would be hugely damaging to the commission's purpose — would be prevented.

Those proposals do not reflect on our opinion of the commissioners designate. This process is not about personalities. In fact, I wish that we could have had the debate about a commission for victims and survivors in advance of appointing anyone to the role. I am on record as saying that any of the four appointed commissioners could have done the job single-handedly. Neither do I doubt the commissioners' wishes — expressed or otherwise — to work together coherently for the betterment of the victims and survivors sector. We do not base judgements on personalities.

As other Members said, we are creating structures that will endure for the long term. Therefore, it is important that those structures are coherent, which is why we tabled amendment Nos 2 and 7, which would

allow for the creation of a chief commissioner and enable people to act with regard to him or her. Such clear lines of authority would be helpful to the commission's smooth working.

We must also be realistic when considering matters pertaining to dispute resolution. In most organisations with which I am involved, there is some form of voting mechanism. Some, such as the system in the Chamber, are increasingly complex; others are simple. However, although we all wish for consensus and that that would be the aim on every occasion, consensus may not always be possible. The Alliance Party would prefer to have a voting mechanism in place so that, rather than complete breakdown and no activity, the commission will be able to make progress on the basis of a division. Once again, that would not negate an individual commissioner's right to express an opinion. Although that is a matter for the commission itself, it might be good practice for it to note such minority opinions when it produces reports. Above all, it would prevent a situation in which nothing can happen because people cannot agree.

Amendment No 10 is specifically designed to remove OFMDFM directions that are mentioned in the Bill. I am not happy with that arrangement, because, having enquired about it, I think that the scope and purpose of such directions have not been clearly defined. Given the sensitivities, complexities and, in particular, politics about victims and survivors, subsequent to legislation, it would be better if the matter were removed as far from the political remit as possible. Directions from OFMDFM would not create confidence in the public mind that such matters are not subject to political interference. I must also say that, in all honesty, if I were involved in an intractable dispute, OFMDFM is perhaps the last place on earth to which I would go in order to have that dispute resolved.

Amendment No 12 would ensure that if there are questions about the appointment of individuals, the commission cannot strike down their work.

That is potentially ultra vires, because a judge could, at any time, strike down any of the appointments, or any work that commissioners had done. If challenges to the commission and its work are deemed appropriate, their outcome will be decided in the courts. It looks foolish and defensive to try to preclude the courts from making such decisions when one does not have the power to do so. The wording in paragraph 10(b) looks like a pre-emptive strike, and it is unnecessary and unworkable. Amendment No 12 does not mean that the commission's work should be struck down. Deleting paragraph 10(b) reflects the reality that no Bill can prevent a judge from striking down the work of the commission. The wording in the Bill is unhelpful.

Although the Alliance Party prefers the mechanism that we have outlined in amendment Nos 9 and 10, amendment No 11, which the SDLP tabled, is a reasonable alternative. The SDLP, in approaching the Bill from the same position as the Alliance Party, has tried to make the best of a bad job. We have tried to be constructive in our approach.

Amendment No 8 was tabled by the junior Minister Mr Donaldson. I have read the amendment carefully and tried to see some merit in it, but there seems to be an element of smoke and mirrors to it. The amendment creates the illusion that it is responding to issues of concern in the Bill without promising to deliver. It is the same as talking about accelerated passage for a Bill but delaying and delaying its Consideration Stage — it creates the illusion of activity where there is stalemate. Those DUP Members who saw merit in our amendments may think that amendment No 8 will achieve the same outcome because it appears to be similar. However, there are key differences: under amendment No 8, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will not “have to” appoint a chief commissioner. Instead, they “may” appoint one in the same way in which they “may” revoke that designation at any stage.

Given that part of the reason for the delay to the Bill’s Consideration Stage was down to Sinn Féin’s opposition to the appointment of a chief commissioner — that is in the public domain — does anyone believe that it will not use its veto in OFMDFM to prevent that happening? The provision in proposed new paragraph 9 exists to cover embarrassment, because, although sub-paragraph (6) states that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister:

“(b) may—

(i) designate a member as Chief Commissioner”,

let us be honest, it is highly unlikely that they will. Therefore, if Members believe that the existence of a chief commissioner and a voting mechanism is sensible, the only way in which to achieve that — in real terms — is to support our amendments and not the alternative that the junior Minister Jeffrey Donaldson proposes.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member agree that some of the DUP Members who, we believe, were supportive of our amendments are missing from the Chamber? That speaks volumes about the turmoil in the DUP over the Bill.

Mrs Long: I cannot comment on other Members’ whereabouts. However, after discussion with Members, their biggest concern with our amendments was that OFMDFM would be unable to appoint a chief commissioner. Therefore, the notion in amendment No 8 that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister may appoint a chief commissioner is a get-out clause for when they fail to do so.

Mr Molloy spoke about delays — I am amazed at the number of times that things must be repeated before Mr Molloy understands them. After devolution, OFMDFM had the rest of last year to appoint a commissioner, which required no legislation or delay. That appointment required only a decision — end of story.

OFMDFM then wanted to appoint a commission that had no legal basis, which caused delays because legislation was necessary to underpin it. It then held up accelerated passage, resulting in Consideration Stage not being moved on two occasions. If we are discussing delays, Sinn Féin is approaching the matter from an extraordinarily weak position.

The focus must be on a strong, clear and coherent voice for victims. Although amendment No 8 may dangle that tantalising prospect in front of people, they should not be deluded. It is not a reality; it is smoke and mirrors.

12.30 pm

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support amendment No 8, and I oppose the other amendments in the group. I have listened intently to this issue being debated over the past few weeks, and it is important for Members to remember that we are speaking about people who lost their lives. Members have spoken about the relatives of people who lost their lives and of those who were injured — the survivors who live with the trauma of bereavement and injury every day of the week. Members must be sensitive to those issues.

The priority and focus should be to try to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors are met as a matter of urgency. The serious issue of victims should not be used for party-political point scoring. It is a sensitive issue.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member tell the House which parties are using the issue for party-political point scoring? On what basis has she made that assertion?

Ms J McCann: I believe that the parties that are using the issue for party-political point scoring are those that keep proposing these silly amendments.

Mrs Long: Does the Member mean OFMDFM?

Ms J McCann: No, I do not. I am not talking about amendment No 8; I am talking about the amendments that have been proposed over the past few weeks. The Member knows exactly whom I am talking about.

I reiterate that we should not use the serious issue of victims for party-political point scoring. The Bill is about putting a commission for victims and survivors in place, and that should be the main focus. A panel of commissioners would bring a mixture of experience, expertise and skills. It would be more representative and would reflect the experience of all victims and

survivors in the important stages of shaping and delivering the services that they need. An inclusive and meaningful process is necessary to address the various needs and demands of victims and survivors. Support for such a process, particularly through delivery programmes at local level, represents an important building block in developing a society that embodies, in a sustainable way, due regard for the need to promote equality and good relations. The focus must be on delivering those programmes to the victims and survivors, and on meeting their needs.

In addressing the legacy of the conflict through community-based initiatives that provide counselling and emotional support, and training and development opportunities, it is important that, when implementing any initiatives on behalf of victims and survivors, we take our lead from the victims and their families. A positive contribution must be made towards helping them to come to terms with their circumstances.

I urge Members to focus on the needs of victims and survivors. The commission for victims and survivors must be allowed to get on with its work and make a real difference. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Cree: Amendment No 8 is an attempt to pull a cloak over some of the issues that have been raised by other parties throughout this protracted process.

Amendment No 8, which proposes replacing paragraph 9 to schedule 1, effectively reinstates the desire for unanimity among the commissioners about the fundamental workings of the commission. It also reinstates a veto of any member of the commission on his or her colleagues with the potential to obstruct the working and functionality of the commission.

Jumbling up the words does not change the fundamental message that one commissioner will be able to obstruct all of the others on the key issues in that process.

Equally, amendment No 8 proposes new paragraph 9(6), which is another Sinn Féin/DUP fudge. The paragraph states that the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly may designate a member as chief commissioner and may, at any time, revoke that designation. I am not a betting man, but I am willing to wager that there will be no chief commissioner in the foreseeable future. If the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister really intended, or had the joint desire, to appoint a chief commissioner, it would have supported the Alliance Party's amendment. I reject amendment No 8 as I consider it to be something of an insult to the intelligence of Members and the innocent victims that the commission will seek to serve.

As has already been stated, it is paramount that the commission is able to proceed with purpose and direction. Amendment No 9, which has been tabled by the Alliance Party, seeks to ensure that a democratic

procedure is enshrined in the process of changing standing orders. That amendment will ensure that no single commissioner will have the power to veto the democratic decisions and proceedings of the commission as a whole.

In order to deliver for innocent victims in Northern Ireland, the commission must act as a single entity. If one Member has a veto, there is a danger that the process will deteriorate into impasse, and moving beyond such an impasse may be extremely difficult and potentially destructive.

Commissioners must be impartial enough to live by the democratic decisions of other members. There has been, and will continue to be, political opposition to the amendment, but it makes practical sense and will better ensure delivery for innocent victims.

Amendment No 9 will help to remove any fears, founded or not, that political influence will be able to obstruct the workings of the commission. I therefore support amendment No 9.

The Ulster Unionist Party Members are reserving judgement on amendment Nos 10, 11 and 12. We are open to being convinced, but certain areas must be properly explored and need further clarification.

In supporting amendment No 9, the Ulster Unionist Party hopes to ensure that the commission can function effectively. However, my interpretation of amendment No 10 is that it would effectively remove any political accountability from the commission. My understanding of the rationale behind such a proposal is that by granting the commission complete freedom of direction, it would potentially move beyond some of the political ramifications that are coupled with the process, giving the commissioners freedom to carry out their duties without interference. Given the way in which the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has handled the issue of the commission so far, I can understand the logic.

However, this matter is like a double-edged sword. Although the independence of the commission must be respected, political accountability is needed. Equally, although we all wish that political ideologies could be removed from the issue, unfortunately the political realities of Northern Ireland are such that nothing is ever black and white, even if it appears to be morally straightforward. There is always the danger that some people will seek to influence the workings of the commission, guided by political and ideological goals.

Mr B McCrea: Just before junior Minister Kelly leaves the Chamber; given the important ramifications of this important topic, would the Member not like to hear what junior Minister Kelly has to say about it?

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not know whether it is significant that junior Minister

Kelly is not here for this part of the debate, but I would certainly like to hear his support for this matter.

The responsibilities of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and the scrutiny of the Assembly, must act as a check to the commission. The UUP's main concern about amendment No 10 is that it would remove those checks. It is therefore necessary that the process has political answerability, and in linking the setting of standing orders to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we will effectively link any decisions on the commission's remit to Assembly scrutiny. That will provide political accountability and responsibility. The problems and sufferings of innocent victims in Northern Ireland should, in part, be the responsibility of all parties in the Assembly. There is an issue as to whether it is correct in a democratic society to allow such a sensitive and important issue to be decoupled from the accountability and pluralism that this Executive and Assembly can give to it. I understand the reasoning behind the amendment, but I am not yet convinced by the soundness of those reasons. However, I am open to being convinced.

Amendment No 11, which has been proposed by the SDLP, is a better attempt at the same issue. However, again I am not convinced that it will sufficiently improve the Bill or change it in any meaningful way. My party and I are, however, still open to being convinced otherwise.

I am not convinced that amendment No 12 will be of benefit to any victims or victims' groups. It smacks slightly of throwing the baby out with the bath water. To start again, or to invalidate the work of the commission on behalf of the victims because of a defect in the appointment of any members, which could be technical, innocent and no fault of the commissioner, may not be the most constructive move.

Mrs Long: I, too, accept the concern that the Member has expressed with regard to amendment No 12. However, I said when I was going through the amendments that this would not automatically mean that the work of the commission was struck down. Nor would it mean that the appointments were struck down. It simply recognises the fact in law that it would be for a court to decide on what action to take, depending on the appointments process or any defect in that process. That would be the case, whether that line of text is included or taken out. It would be better for the House to reflect on the reality of the situation, which is that we cannot order a court how to proceed if defects are found in the appointments process. That is the reality whether that text is there or not.

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for that explanation, which certainly makes sense.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports amendment Nos 2 and 7.

Mr Durkan: I rise to support amendment Nos 2 and 7. The question of ensuring that there will be a chief commissioner is an important one. The SDLP wants a commission that has corporate coherence and cogency. Indeed, we want a commission that has real and serious powers, comparable to those of the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Children's Commissioner; and equivalent to the requirements of the Paris Principles. That is necessary so that if someone wants to bring a case or a complaint, then the commission can receive and investigate them, and command any relevant evidence — something which, at present, it cannot do.

In order for the commission to do be able to do that, and to have those types of powers, it must have the same sort of cogency and coherence as other organisations. There must be someone who is clearly the chief, who takes the final decision when necessary and with whom the buck stops, and who can take the initiative and lead interventions in a positive and proactive way. That is what is needed.

If Members are serious when they say that they want the commission to be able to work for victims and to deal with issues in a proper manner, then they should want it to have powers equivalent to those of the other commissions to which those proposing this Bill refer constantly. We are told repeatedly about the comparison with the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission when discussing the number of commissioners. However, we also want the issues of power, structure and corporate governance to be addressed.

The commission would be better served with a chief commissioner who would be visible to people. Consequently, the commission would be taken more seriously, and that would also give us hope of its being awarded the sort of powers that are needed if it is to match the requirements of the Paris Principles. After all, the Paris Principles are about any Government-created body that deals with human-rights issues.

Of the various commissions that exist, the victims' commission does not satisfy human-rights standards. It is a terrible indictment of the Assembly that Members are producing a Bill to establish a victims' commission, but that that victims' commission does not adhere to the human-rights standards outlined in the Paris Principles. Those who beat their breasts and boast about their great work for victims, and claim that no one else has ever done anything for victims, must respond to that point. They will oppose the possibility of granting the commission further powers by insisting that it cannot even have a chief commissioner.

12.45 pm

Over the past number of weeks, debates have been cancelled. Other parties took to the airwaves and said that a chief commissioner could not be appointed

because that would create a hierarchy of commissioners and, therefore, a hierarchy of victims. That seems to confirm many peoples' suspicions that appointing four separate commissioners implies that different commissioners have different victim constituencies, which would create difficulties.

We were told that it was wrong to project that suspicion. One party sponsoring the Bill and the idea of having four commissioners said that the appointment of a chief commissioner would give rise to a hierarchy of victims. How would the appointment of a chief commissioner give rise to a hierarchy of victims? We need an answer to that question.

I notice that Sinn Féin has not raised that specific argument in the Chamber today; they have gone quiet on it — but have not dropped it — in order to support the pretence of amendment No 8, which provides for the appointment of a chief commissioner in the future. During an earlier debate, the DUP outlined that there will be not only a chief commissioner, but also additional commissioners and, indeed, various part-time commissioners. Why is there concern about a hierarchy of commissioners? We heard from those on the opposite Benches that the part-time commissioners may have particular specialisms and interests. The arguments are contradictory and inconsistent.

Mr Poots: The Member said previously that there could not be a chief commissioner. However, his speech now seems to accept that there can be a chief commissioner. The Member will recognise that we are here today because ten years ago we had the Belfast Agreement, which his party supported and eulogised, and which allowed terrorists to run free from prison. There was a period when the SDLP were in Government when nothing was done to help victims, and during that period, hundreds of thousands of pounds were allocated to the victims' commission — as opposed to the tens of millions of pounds being allocated now. Since then, there has been an interim commissioner, and the victims' commission is progressing: compare that with the record of Mr Durkan and his colleagues.

Mr Durkan: I note that the Member barely addressed today's issue and was not checked on that point. The Member said that I changed my mind on whether a chief commissioner could be appointed. I did no such thing. I made the point that his party and Sinn Féin will vote against the clear provision that there will be a chief commissioner — they are resisting such a provision. Instead, his party is trying to kid itself and everyone else with amendment No 8 — a cross between a fig leaf and a figment — which pretends that there could be a chief commissioner.

However, everybody knows that Sinn Féin's position has not changed. Although its Members might not repeat it in the Chamber, its position has not

changed. Therefore, Mr Poots and others can pretend to have found an opening and an option, but the scenario is similar to that in the song 'There's a Hole in my Bucket', because Sinn Féin will not agree to the appointment of a chief commissioner.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member agree that it is disappointing that, although he has made some fine points, the junior Minister to whom he addressed them is not in the Chamber for this important debate? Sinn Féin claims that this is an important matter; however, not too many of its Members are present.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his point. I am sure that those Members have all sorts of other important business to carry out both here and elsewhere.

Amendment No 8 purports to address several of the concerns that have been expressed by those of us other than the junior Minister who tabled amendments. Are the issues that we raised important enough to be addressed in a valid amendment — which, we are told, amendment No 8 is — or are our issues so specious and spurious as simply to be — as we are also being told — nit-picking and wrecking amendments? Which is it to be? Both those propositions cannot be true. Yet, we are being told that amendment No 8 is an attempt to address issues in good faith. However, the rest of us are being attacked for raising in our amendments those very issues that amendment No 8 now pretends to deal with.

Amendment No 8, which we oppose, changes schedule 1, paragraph 9 to the Bill from a seven-line paragraph to a 27-line paragraph. It adds very little, other than to get the DUP off the hook about the position of a chief commissioner. Amendment No 8 also retains the provisions that were contained in the original paragraph 9 of schedule 1, which gave the First Minister and deputy First Minister powers to issue directions to the commission about its standing orders. Therefore, as well as dealing with the issue of a chief commissioner, amendment No 8 purports to deal with some of the issues that are connected to the commission's procedures, not least in respect of its standing orders. In the schedule to the Bill, there is provision for standing orders to be made unanimously only by the commission — there is no provision for gridlock. Of course, it also allows the First Minister and deputy First Minister to override directions to add to or change those standing orders, even when the commission has agreed them unanimously.

We tabled amendment No 11 in order to provide for a situation in which a clear majority of the commission may agree or amend standing orders. Rather than allowing an embarrassing gridlock to develop, that amendment allows for standing orders to be referred to the First Minister and deputy First Minister for approval on the basis of sufficient consensus. Those who have argued against our amendment say that they do not want to create a situation in which the commission's standing orders

are referred to OFMDFM. That is because they say that that office should not be involved in that sort of thing.

However, the Bill as it stands — and the proposed amendment — gives the First Minister and deputy First Minister the power of direction over the commission's standing orders at any time. It is nonsense to say that what is being suggested is an attempt to insulate OFMDFM from difficulties in the commission, or, indeed, vice versa. Furthermore, in addition to the provisions in the Bill that allow the First Minister and deputy First Minister to appoint or remove members of the commission, there are more than a dozen other cases in which the work of the commission and its limited powers are subject to approval from, or screening by, OFMDFM. Again, we are puncturing the pretence that the First Minister and deputy First Minister will not be immersed in some of the issues that affect the commission. They will be, and the Bill provides for that.

The arguments that have been given previously against what the SDLP has provided for in amendment No 11 — or what the Alliance Party, coming at the issue from a slightly different route, is providing for in amendment Nos 9 and 10 — do not stack up. Both the SDLP and the Alliance Party have tried to resolve the gridlocked situation in a fair and practical way. The amendment proposed by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister simply threatens to recycle that gridlock in various ways.

We support amendment No 12. I note Mr Cree's concern that that amendment might allow the commission's good work to be struck down completely by any legal challenge. That would be unlikely. Court decisions are proportionate in their consequential requirements; we have seen that in other cases. However, it would be a dangerous precedent for the Assembly, in its first year of restored devolution, and given that it has not discharged much legislation, to pass legislation that deliberately tries to insulate the Government — as we are told that we should now call it — from the consequences of legal challenge. I have opposed such attempts in another place, as have some of the Members opposite.

I remember when the Northern Ireland (Offences) Bill went through Westminster. It contained provisions that allowed the Secretary of State to insulate himself and others from any possible legal challenges about the Bill's effects. Members objected strongly to that on a point of principle. We must have careful regard to that. I do not want to set a precedent that could result in legislation from any Department containing clauses or provisions to insulate that Department from legal challenges. As we go through this bundle of amendments, we must be careful and know the various issues that we are dealing with.

Several Members who have discussed the various amendments have again dragged up the claim that nothing was done for victims before. The Good Friday Agreement made clear promises to victims. I have

always been upfront in saying that those promises were never fulfilled. As I recall, the SDLP and the Alliance Party tried to address the issue of victims at Weston Park, as on other occasions. We did not succeed; victims did not get a mention in the Government's declaration, and we complained about that at the time.

Similarly, during the negotiation of the joint declaration that was produced in the spring of 2003, we pressed for a victims' and survivors' forum, but we found only a very lukewarm reference in the declaration. We were told that that was because the forum was opposed by other parties. When the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister introduced and consulted on the victims' strategy, the DUP heckled, disrupted and undermined it on the issue of the definition of "victim". We must remember that there were two victims' units at that time. The NIO was handling several victims' issues, while in the devolved Administration —

Mr Poots: Excuses, excuses.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Durkan: The First Minister and deputy First Minister took the initiative that there should be a victims liaison unit in the context of devolution as well. Moneys and various means were identified, although they were not enough. However, those who are telling us about the victims' strategy that is highlighted in the Programme for Government and those who tell us about funding for victims have still not told us what the victims' commission will do or say about the victims' strategy or about funding.

It is still the case that, if someone has a grievance or complaint about a decision on the allocation of funding for victims, he or she will have no mission of going to the victims' commission about it.

1.00 pm

The commission for victims and survivors is in no position to receive any complaint, or to pursue any complaint, enquiry or investigation. Earlier, we were told that something that comes from one Department, or its Minister, is deemed to have come from the Government as a whole, because that Department is part of the Government —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Member; he may return to his speech after lunchtime. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Durkan: Before the debate was suspended, I made the point that we had been told that an initiative from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister amounted to an initiative from Government. Furthermore, it was argued from a sedentary position that an initiative made by a part of the Government is the same as one from the Government.

In the commission for victims and survivors, there will be no chief commissioner. At least one of the parties in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will not allow there to be a chief commissioner, now or in the future. Things may, or may not, be done in the name of the commission. Individual commissioners will engage with different people, and we have been told that different commissioners will have different specialisms. The question arises whether something said or done by a commissioner is said or done on behalf of the commission. That is a recipe for all sorts of confusion, misinterpretation and misrepresentation, which we could well do without. Misunderstandings might arise about communications or events in which individual commissioners are involved. Should the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister take those up with the individual commissioners or with the commission as a whole?

The kinds of issue that might arise, and the matters that should be ironed out or clarified, illustrate the good sense in having a chief commissioner, with whom any issue may be raised and addressed. That avoids the need to contact all the commissioners equally and at the same time. If some commissioners are contacted and others are not, a record is made of unequal contact, communication and engagement between the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the commissioners. Alternatively, real contact between that office and the commission might be through whoever is the chief officer of the commission, which, in turn, raises issues about the real standing of the commissioners.

Amendment No 8 provides for review, but we know that parties in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister do not seriously intend to conduct such a review. Practice will show that those provisions need to be substantially reviewed. Later developments will show that the review should be held, and that significant changes in the legislation should be made, at this stage.

We should not simply pass on a direct rule Bill. No changes are made to the powers, functions or remit of the commission, even though the Bill creates a commission instead of a commissioner. The Assembly should not declare itself satisfied with the limited

provision made by a direct rule Order in Council. That is not a good message for the Assembly to send out on any issue but, most importantly, not one involving victims and survivors.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. The amendments are complex and the issues bear detailed discussion which, I am glad to say, is taking place.

I wish to respond to points made by various contributors. Mrs Kelly a Member for Upper Bann, said that there was a lack of consensus and leadership on the part of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Yet the amendments that we have tabled, including amendment No 8, represent a consensus in OFMDFM, and there is agreement on how those issues should be addressed. As to leadership, we have presented the Bill and, if it passes, we will proceed with the appointment of a commission, which will play a crucial role in addressing the multiplicity of issues that affect the victims' sector in Northern Ireland. When leadership is required, we seek to ensure that we are not found wanting.

Mrs Kelly also raised concerns about the lack of powers of investigation that the victims' commission will have. OFMDFM believes that the commission will have a clear role to play. That role will evolve over time and will develop in tandem with the victims' strategy that we hope to announce in the near future in consultation with the other key stakeholders in the victims' sector.

We are not seeking to dictate to people in how we are proceeding with these matters. We want to work in partnership with people so that we can develop an efficient and effective support infrastructure for the victims and survivors in Northern Ireland so that they can get the help that they need when they need it.

My friend the Member for South Belfast Mr Jimmy Spratt made an excellent contribution to the debate. He spoke, using his considerable experience as a former police officer and as chairman of the Police Federation. I know that Jimmy experienced at first-hand the tragedies of what became known as the Troubles, and he worked with many of his former colleagues and their families when they experienced grief and loss. Therefore, he is well qualified to speak about the needs of the victims' sector.

In contrast, Basil McCrea, who seems to be the resident expert on all matters in the Assembly, talked about amendment No 8 being a shoddy piece of work. Indeed, I note that he is absent from the Chamber. He indicated that some of us lacked experience in dealing with victims' issues, and he was clear about his own interpretation of how the Government operate.

I am not here today to discuss my own record. However, in over 25 years of active involvement in

politics in Northern Ireland, I believe that I have accrued some experience of the feelings of victims. I have met many times with individual victims and groups, and I feel that I have a good sense of how they feel. Having spoken to some in that sector recently, I know that they want to see things move forward and that they want support mechanisms introduced that will help them to deal with the past.

Basil McCrea tells us that we cannot dwell in the past and that we must move on. However, he then decries what we are trying to do through the victims' commission to heal the wounds of the past. I wish that he would make up his mind, instead of simply trying to engage in cheap point scoring.

I refuse to defer to him in any discussion of the DUP's experience of victims and their needs over the past three decades and more. My party makes that a priority, and we make no apology for doing so. That is why one of the first things that we have tried to do as a Government — and as the largest party in that Government — is to address the needs of victims and survivors. Therefore, when Basil McCrea accuses us of producing a shoddy piece of work, I simply say to him that our record on victims is longer and speaks louder than his.

Mrs Long: The junior Minister has just elucidated passionately the DUP's point of view on victims. However, is it not the case that he is here today to speak on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister? Therefore, any statement that he makes should reflect the joint view of that Department, not simply the policy of one party in that Department.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): That statement is a bit rich coming from that quarter. Parties have questioned whether OFMDFM is united on the amendments. Those same parties have also asked whether the fact that mine was the sole name on the Order Paper was an indication of division in OFMDFM. I assure the Member that that is not the case; I am speaking for the Department.

However, I am entitled to respond — and I will do so robustly — when my party is attacked and when specific reference is made to my role. I will not take lectures from the likes of Basil McCrea who, when victims were suffering most at the height of the Troubles, was nowhere to be seen. He was not involved in politics.

He is what I call a ceasefire politician; he put his head above the parapet when the trouble was over. Let us not take lectures from the likes of Basil McCrea about what we are doing for the victims. We worked for and alongside the victims when the gunfire and the bombs were going off, unlike some people who have come to the debate late and pretend that they know it all.

Danny Kennedy and Leslie Cree said that amendment No 8 offers the power of veto. I wish that Members

would read the amendments closely. If they did, they would know that amendment No 8 does the opposite to what Mr Kennedy and Mr Cree state. It allows for most of the decisions of the commission to be taken by a simple majority. It is beyond me how anyone can say that that gives anyone the power to exercise a veto.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the junior Minister for giving way. Can he clarify the position? In instances where there is not agreement and a matter comes to a vote in the commission, there will be deadlock unless one of the objectors abstains. Can the Minister confirm that there are scenarios in which a veto can be exercised, for good or for ill?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Mr Kennedy is dealing with one aspect of amendment No 8. The amendment requires unanimity in certain circumstances, which I will come to later. If a member does not support an issue and chooses to abstain or, perhaps, is not present for the meeting, unanimity will be required among those present and voting.

I remind the Member that amendment No 8 relates to a narrow band of the commission's work. It deals with the work plan and financial decisions relating to the commission's research work. The majority of the decisions on the commission's day-to-day work will be agreed by a simple majority, but Mr Kennedy chooses to ignore that crucial part of the amendment that makes an important change to the original Bill, which required unanimity on everything. In proposing amendment No 8, I am trying to reflect on and deal with the concerns that have been raised.

I hope that Members are clear. Far from wanting to create vetoes, amendment No 8 seeks to remove the prospect of deadlock and to allow for sensible decision-making by a simple majority on most of the issues that will come before the victims' commission.

Mrs Long spoke of the need for strong and coherent direction on the issue of victims and survivors. I agree with her on that, even if we disagree on the Bill and the amendments. However, she said that amendment No 8 was about smoke and mirrors. I know that I will not convince the Alliance Party, but the objectives of amendment No 8 are to improve the procedures of the commission and to help the commissioners to reach decisions. It is also about making provision for the appointment of a chief commissioner — should that be deemed to be in the interest of the future effective and efficient work of the commission.

It is our view that a chief commissioner is not required at present. We want to give the commission time to bed in, and we want to see how the four commissioners work and how effective and efficient the commission is with them. If, in the fullness of time, it becomes clear that the efficiency and effectiveness of the commission would be improved by appointing a

chief commissioner, one can be appointed under the provisions of amendment No 8.

Mr Ford: When Mr Donaldson says “our view”, is he giving the view of OFMDFM or that of the DUP — as was the case in his response to Basil McCrea?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): When it comes to voting on that matter, it will become clear to the Member that it is the view of both.

2.15 pm

I am pleased that Mr Durkan conceded that his party and the UUP had failed to deliver for victims and that, although the Belfast Agreement mentioned dealing with those issues, unfortunately it seems that they failed to deliver on that. At least one party is honest enough to admit that it fell short when it came to dealing with victims’ and survivors’ issues.

Mr McClarty: Was the Minister not a member of the Ulster Unionist delegation, which took part in the talks at Weston Park, at which the issue of victims was not mentioned?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Indeed I was; I was there to keep an eye on the Ulster Unionists and to ensure that they did not sell out Ulster any more. *[Interruption.]*

The amendments under discussion broadly deal with two issues; namely, the appointment of a chief commissioner and the voting arrangements for the commission that are to be provided in its standing orders. I will now outline why the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has tabled an amendment that amalgamates those issues. I will deal with amendment No 12 at the end.

Amendment No 8, tabled by OFMDFM, provides that, at any time, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, may designate a chief commissioner. It also provides that, at any time, that designation can be revoked if it is not felt to be in the commission’s best interests. The commission’s standing orders will provide for matters such as a quorum, procedure at meetings and chairing arrangements. The legislation currently leaves it to the commissioners to decide on such matters. That is an appropriate arrangement, and one that is in line with practice in other established commissions. We have every confidence that the four commissioners designate are best placed to decide on those matters at this time.

The amendment allows flexibility to designate a chief commissioner. Again, that allows for the structure of the commission to be flexible, to meet the changing or emerging needs of victims and survivors and to ensure that its adequacy and effectiveness are underpinned. The amendment is sufficiently wide in order to allow the First Minister and deputy First Minister to appoint a chief commissioner from the

existing commissioners, or, alternatively, to appoint a new commissioner who could then be designated as chief commissioner. That power is an enabling power, and there is, therefore, no need to outline the specific duties of the chief commissioner in the legislation.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister state whether the DUP or Sinn Féin took on board the view of victims’ groups as to whether there should be a commissioner or a commission, given the somewhat belated emphasis that they have placed on the feelings and views of victims’ and survivors’ groups?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I assure the Member that, prior to the appointment of a commission, several victims’ groups have indicated their support for the establishment of a proper commission in Northern Ireland. I accept that that is not a unanimous view, but if Mrs Kelly is to visit the websites of some of those groups, she will find that, in previous representations on the matter, those groups supported the concept of a commission.

OFMDFM believes strongly that its amendment strikes a good balance between allowing the commissioners — as currently envisaged — to work together and to decide their standing orders and chairing arrangements, and providing the power to designate a chief commissioner at any future time without the need for further legislation. I, therefore, urge Members to reject amendment No 2 and consequential amendment No 7.

The next issue that the second group of amendments raises is that of the commission’s voting procedure. OFMDFM has proposed an amendment that would allow for decisions to be made on a majority basis in the commission, in normal circumstances. The legislation as drafted provides for the commissioners to decide between them when a majority vote would be sufficient. However, given the concerns that exist — as evidenced by what has been said in the House and by the amendments tabled — we have decided to make it clear that the commission’s standing orders must allow for decisions on any matter to be made by a majority of those voting.

However, there are two exceptions to that. The first deals with the work plan for the commissioners and any amendment or revision to that work plan. Currently, the commissioners’ work plan needs to be agreed in conjunction with OFMDFM. It was felt that that should have the support of all those who will vote on the matter. Amendment No 8 is drafted in such a way that any member can abstain or simply note the work plan, which would not prevent a decision from being taken. OFMDFM is content that that would provide the optimum buy-in and input to the work plan by all the commissioners and OFMDFM.

The second issue is the provision of financial assistance under article 7(1) of The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which deals with research and educational grants. It is not envisaged that the commission would have a significant budget for that. The Department decides on all financing to the commission. However, that provision is another safety mechanism on matters of expenditure.

It is not envisaged that the commission, or any commissioner, will play a role in the distribution of any funding to groups or individuals. The remit of the commission is clearly set out in article 7 of The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, and does not include a funding role.

Amendment No 8 also provides that, when the commission is operating some of its responsibilities as set out in article 7(4) and article 6(2) of The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, it must specify whether that decision was taken by a majority or all of those who voted. That will allow the flexibility for majority decisions to be taken on any issues, while making clear what level of endorsement a decision carries.

Amendment No 8 also places a statutory duty on the Department to keep the working arrangements of the commission under review. That will offer the strongest possible protection to ensure that any issues of working-arrangement problems or a lack of effectiveness can be addressed.

The amendment also provides that the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, can give directions to the commission to regulate its procedure. It is not envisaged that that power will be used frequently. However, it provides an option that enables the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to intervene if it is clear that a problem has arisen in the agreed standing orders and in the working arrangements of the commission. That will also afford the First Minister and the deputy First Minister the ability to make a direction, if required, after the statutory review.

We urge all Members to support amendment No 8, and reject amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for giving way. In his response, particularly when referring to Members' contributions on amendment No 8, he made an unfortunate attack on my colleague the Member for Lagan Valley Mr Basil McCrea. Although even Mr McCrea will accept that he is a comparative newcomer to representative politics, that is no cause or reason for the junior Minister to indulge in such a personal invective against the Member. Basil McCrea uses exclusively peaceful and democratic means to put forward his arguments, which has not always been the case with Ministers from OFMDFM.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Basil McCrea needs to learn that if he is going to go on the attack and make the type of statements that he made during his contribution, he must be prepared to take a little back in return. That is the rough and tumble of politics. My record was questioned by the Member for Lagan Valley Mr McCrea, and I make no apology for defending that record. I stood shoulder to shoulder with victims during the dark days of the Troubles. Certain people who now talk loudly were nowhere to be seen in those days. I make no apology for describing them as ceasefire politicians.

Amendment No 12 concerns the proceedings of the commission and the implications of any defect in the appointment of any of its members. The Bill provides that any proceedings of the commission would not be affected by any defect in the appointment of any of its members. The amendment seeks to delete that provision, which would serve only to create uncertainty about the validity of all the proceedings of the commission, should any defect in an appointment come to light.

Mrs Long: I thank the junior Minister for giving way. I recognise the sensitivity of this issue, because there have been previous cases in which courts have struck down pieces of work. In that particular case, the decision was very unfortunate.

Does the junior Minister not accept that removing line 40 from page 4 of the Bill does not change the fact that a court could choose to strike down this piece of legislation — regardless of what it states — because such decisions will ultimately be made by a court?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The courts will make decisions if there are challenges; and those decisions must be left to the courts. The commission is a body corporate, not a collection of individuals. I see no compelling reason why a defect in appointing one individual should render the decision of the commission in doubt. I, therefore, urge Members to reject amendment No 12.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Ford does not have sufficient time to wind up on amendment No 12 before 2.30 pm, when Question Time will commence. I, therefore, suggest that Members take their ease until 2.30 pm. The debate will resume at 4.00 pm, when Mr Ford will make his winding-up speech.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Clostridium Difficile

1. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on his Department's efforts to reduce the level of clostridium difficile infections. (AQO 3309/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): In January, I announced an additional investment of £9 million over the comprehensive spending review period and a series of new measures to tackle healthcare-associated infections. My Department and the health and social care organisations are now working to deliver those measures. In particular, the service delivery unit will be working proactively with all trusts during 2008-09 to ensure that we achieve our target for reducing clostridium difficile cases by 20% by March 2009.

The first step will be to agree with trusts, by the end of May, the key actions that trusts must introduce. I have asked the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to conduct an urgent independent review into the outbreak of clostridium difficile in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. The main aim of that review is to identify as quickly as possible any lessons that must be learned, so that we can act on those lessons quickly and make healthcare safer in all trusts.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for his answer. The public will be listening very carefully.

I pay tribute to the effort and organisation of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in tackling the clostridium difficile outbreak. I recognise the worry and concern of relatives of elderly patients who have been infected. What will be done to tackle the lack of information for patients and relatives once patients are infected, as that is evidently an issue?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As the Member is aware, I have announced several measures and initiatives as we have worked our way through the crisis. I subscribe to Mr O'Loan's remarks about the efforts that have been made in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. I visited Antrim Area Hospital at the outbreak of the 027 strain of

clostridium difficile, and I was impressed by the approach taken by staff. The involvement of patients and their families is a key part of our approach, along with giving appropriate information during and after the outbreak. For example, we issued one million copies of a leaflet on infection control to the public and to visitors to hospitals, which is part of obtaining the support of the general public, particularly visitors to hospitals and patients' families.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that clostridium difficile and other hospital-acquired infections can be reduced by a consistently high level of cleaning of public spaces, especially in our hospitals?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is important to remember that clostridium difficile is contained in the general population; 30% of people over 65 years of age carry clostridium difficile, and around 3% of the younger population also carry it. Therefore, it is not something that can ever be eliminated. However, we are seeking to contain it, and several measures are needed. I have announced measures that we are taking in order to ensure that clostridium difficile is contained and isolated where it is found.

The prescription of broad-spectrum antibiotics has allowed clostridium difficile to prosper in hospitals. I have announced measures for a pharmacist to be employed in each trust area to oversee the prudent use of antibiotics in order to reduce their use.

Cleansing and cohort nursing are part of the answer, as is isolation. Several measures can be taken, and we have announced our responses.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I acknowledge the work of the health professionals, the Minister and his Department in responding to the situation. However, in light of the widespread concern among relatives and the general public, when will the RQIA report on its investigation into the outbreak in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The RQIA was asked to carry out its inspection in 12 weeks. It is now about four weeks into its investigation, and it will certainly be with us by the summer.

One of the other measures that I announced in relation to the RQIA was the introduction of unannounced inspections. Those are already happening and will now become routine.

Stroke Strategy

2. **Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what commitment he will give to recognising an acute stroke as a medical emergency as part of the stroke strategy. (AQO 3304/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 29 November 2007, I issued the ‘Improving Stroke Services in Northern Ireland’ document for full public consultation. That consultation ended on 28 March 2008. My Department is analysing the responses, and I understand that the proposals have been positively received. Until I have had the opportunity to consider all of the responses, all I will say is that the final proposals will clearly recognise the seriousness of strokes as medical emergencies and the benefits of early diagnosis and treatment.

Mrs Hanna: I thank the Minister, and I am sure that he, like me, knows that speed is of the essence — we can compare strokes with heart attacks. Has the Minister anticipated the training needs involved? He will realise how important it is to get physiotherapy and occupational therapy services in place quickly when someone has a stroke, if that person is to make a good recovery.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes. Indeed, training is one of the key areas, as is public awareness. People must become aware of the signs that someone is taking a stroke; and of stroke prevention measures relating to lifestyle and cardio-vascular issues, such as obesity, smoking, alcohol, exercise and so on. People must understand what is happening when a person is taking a stroke. Speed is of the essence. It is believed that 40% of strokes are preventable, and that if the response time can be reduced to three hours — from the onset of a stroke to the drug actually being administered, including the scan period — then the outcome for the patient is so much better. There is a menu of things that are required and that we are working on. Staff training and public awareness are among the issues.

Mr Buchanan: I note that the Minister stated that speed is of the essence. Will he confirm to the House whether a patient in west Tyrone who suffers an acute stroke can receive emergency medical treatment at Tyrone County Hospital or whether the current protocol and removal of services prevent that from happening, placing the people of West Tyrone in a more vulnerable position?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In response to stroke, the priority is to get the person to a stroke unit as quickly as possible. There are nine stroke units in Northern Ireland. If people can be scanned within three hours, and the scans show that they have had a stroke, then thrombolytic, clot-busting drugs can be administered, and a marked improvement in recovery can be made. Four thousand people in Northern Ireland are affected by strokes each year — one third dies in the first month, one third is left with a substantial disability, and one third fully recovers. However, 40% of those strokes can be

prevented, through dealing with factors such as smoking, obesity and high blood pressure.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Is he aware that many people in the South Armagh area live outside the 20-minute response time for ambulances? That can impact significantly on early diagnosis and treatment. As the Minister may be aware, a petition from the people of south Armagh in relation to the lack of adequate ambulance cover in the area was handed in today. What measures will the Minister implement to address that inequality?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The ambulance-response time we strive for is eight minutes. A petition was handed to me.

As I told the Member’s colleague Conor Murphy, I will examine the response times in that area. When a scan is taken and drugs administered within three hours of the onset of a stroke, patients show a marked improvement in their recovery. Therefore, response times are critical.

Binge Drinking

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department is taking to reduce the rise in binge drinking.
(AQO 3288/08)

Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol

12. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to meet the drinks industry and supermarkets to discuss price controls on the sale of alcohol to address the health implications of alcohol abuse. (AQO 3280/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I wish to answer questions 3 and 12 together. My Department takes seriously the misuse of alcohol — particularly binge drinking and underage drinking. They have been identified as key priorities in the new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs, and an advisory group on binge drinking has been established to ensure that they are prioritised in policies throughout Government.

My Department has implemented a range of measures to address binge drinking: a public information campaign on the associated health risks; support for UK initiatives on unit labelling; and the encouragement and funding of local partnerships, events and materials to support regional initiatives. An action plan to address young people’s drinking is being developed.

I intend to meet representatives of the alcohol industry, including producers and retailers, in the near

future to discuss how they can play a full part in helping to address the misuse of alcohol, underage drinking and binge drinking. I also plan to hold more detailed discussions with relevant Departments.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer. I welcome the news that he has set up an advisory group on binge drinking, and I support his targeting of young people. During his planned meetings, will the Minister press the industry, particularly supermarkets, to stop using alcohol as a loss leader? Will he assure Members that he will urge the industry to take wider responsibility for society, so that citizens are not encouraged to abuse alcohol?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I take on board what Mr Beggs says. Supermarkets play a significant role in binge drinking, particularly underage drinking, not least because of the low unit cost at which they are able to sell alcohol. Their prices are, in general, much lower than those in off-licences, and that makes large amounts of alcohol much more widely available.

The way in which the law is administered must be examined. We are constantly told that young people obtain most of their alcohol from adults who buy it legally and pass it on to them. I find it hard to understand how young people can have so many adults at their disposal.

Any misuse of alcohol is a matter of great public concern, and communities are concerned about the effects on their safety of the increases in binge drinking, antisocial behaviour and general abuse of alcohol. I will seek to restrict young people's access to alcohol, and the drinks industry, parents and so forth all have a part to play in that. The main emphasis must be on enforcement and prevention.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his answer and for taking a particular interest in the issue. The Irish Government recently published proposals on the sale and advertising of alcohol. Will the Minister examine those proposals to determine whether any lessons can be learned, or best practice shared, as a result of that extensive piece of work?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am extremely interested in tackling that issue. I am happy to undertake to examine the experience of other jurisdictions, including the Irish Republic, Scotland, Wales and England. The problem is universal, and finding common responses to shared problems would be helpful. For example, alcohol plays a significant role in suicide, particularly in young suicides, and we seek to work closely and carefully to address that.

The regional public health authority proposed in my restructuring plans will also help because it will assume lead responsibility in that area.

2.45 pm

Mr McCausland: The Minister referred in his answer to underage drinking and to binge drinking, which is also particularly associated with young people. Will he agree that alcohol abuse is a widespread problem that affects people of all ages? In view of the seriousness of the situation in Northern Ireland, will he agree to work with the Minister for Social Development in a cross-departmental approach, bearing in mind the previous supplementary question, to develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy to tackle alcohol abuse — that strategy to include education, legislation, treatment and models of good practice?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mr McCausland illustrates exactly what we are trying to do and the direction that we are taking. He is right to say that abuse of alcohol is a serious issue. Figures show that 70% of adults in Northern Ireland drink and 43% of men and 33% of women currently binge drink, which is the main reason for setting up the binge drinking advisory group. It has access to a cross-departmental approach, and that is the direction in which we are moving. There will be widespread consultation and not just with the drinks industry; there will be a drive to educate parents.

Drugs and alcohol groups and the binge drinking advisory group have local action plans that aim to use collective good practice to tackle the problem. However, the point that I made at the very beginning about the easy accessibility of alcohol, especially for young people, is key. Alcohol, particularly beer, is so cheap that a bottle of beer in a supermarket costs less than a bottle of water, which massively increases accessibility.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Following on from Nelson McCausland's question, will the Minister talk to the DSD Minister about having off-licences print their names on blue bags, so that those responsible for the sales can be identified?

Will he also discuss the new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs with his counterpart in the South? While the Minister is having those discussions, will he establish what measures are being taken to cut the connection between sport and alcohol promotion? For example, is the Minister speaking to the DCAL Minister to ensure that drinks companies cannot promote sports competitions or advertise their brands on sports jerseys?

Finally, is the Minister having any discussion with the alcohol industry about drinks promotions encouraging binge drinking in pubs and clubs? He is probably aware, as we all are, that for an entrance charge of £15 or so, customers can binge drink all evening in some pubs or clubs. *[Interruption.]*

Go raibh míle maith agat. Thank you for your manners. *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The best that I can do is respond in writing to that series of questions, and I am happy to do so.

MiddleStep Services

4. **Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to take forward the recommendations to introduce middlestep services, as outlined in the policy paper 'Independence and Well-Being in Sight' produced by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. (AQO 3315/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I support the principles put forward by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association in its policy paper.

However, I recognise that some of the key elements of that model are already being delivered in trusts. It is important not to duplicate, or overlap with, existing services — for example, the eye clinic liaison officer service already provides some middlestep services and is being expanded across Northern Ireland by the Royal National Institute of Blind people (RNIB).

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I accept that duplication is not necessary, but the best organisation of services that provide support for blind and partially sighted people is necessary.

Will the Minister, therefore, confirm that people who are blind or partially sighted will be given every opportunity to reach their full potential and that he will commit to continuing professional development for staff who provide rehabilitation services?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am happy to give Mrs O'Neill that positive response. I would not, for one second, be complacent and say that the Department is doing all that it can — it continues to develop those services. To bridge the gap between assessment, treatment and rehabilitation involves several parts and people such as eye-clinic liaison officers; help-desk staff, low-vision clinics and so on. The Department continues to roll out those services, which are already established in several areas. There is much to be done. A strategic alliance between the three relevant bodies — the Royal National Institute of Blind People, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association — would be a big help to people who suffer sensory deprivation and would be a major help to the Health Service.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his response. Given the Department's commitment to take forward the recommendations of the Bamford Review, does the Minister know the extent of the met and unmet needs of blind and partially sighted people in respect of mental health and well-being, particularly during the

time when their sight problems are formally diagnosed by an ophthalmic optician?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Bamford Review did not examine needs in respect of the mental health and well-being of people who are blind or partially sighted; however, it did examine those needs with respect to people who are deaf. Health services are capable of examining the issue, and I acknowledge that it is an important one. I am happy to ask the mental health and learning disability board to advise me and the Department of needs in that area and to inform us whether it was an oversight in the Bamford Review or whether is something that is already being taken care of adequately? I am happy to write to the Member in due course.

Mrs Long: Having had recent experience of a family member who has become visually impaired through glaucoma — and I am aware that the situation is the same for macular degeneration — I hope that the Minister can provide some reassurance that a consistent approach will be taken in such cases to provide advice and support to all those who receive such diagnoses. It seems there are inconsistencies. Some patients are being offered referrals and assistance while others are being left to cope with the consequences alone.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mrs Long makes an important point. A consistent approach must be taken. Everyone is entitled to the same standard of treatment. Inconsistencies should not occur. Services should be provided according to individual assessments and needs. When that does not happen, the Department must be determined to bridge the gap. I am happy to assure the Member of my undertaking to examine the crucial issue of whether treatment is available to individuals who are blind or who suffer from visual impairment. It would be dreadful if they were not able to avail of the services that are provided.

Private Practice Dentists

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dentists who offer only private practice treatment. (AQO 3302/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to detail, or identify, the number of dentists who are offering only private-practice treatment. General dental practitioners who are independent contractors are under no obligation to advise their respective health boards or any other body as to how many patients they treat under private-practice arrangements, and they can choose to provide general dental services, private dentistry, or a mixture of both. There is also no obligation on general dental

practitioners to accept a patient for Health Service treatment. Contractual obligations do not permit health and social services boards to compel practitioners to provide general dental services.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for his answer. What plans does the Department have to recruit dentists to the NHS, retain them, and, more importantly, to motivate dentists who currently do not take on NHS patients to do so? It seems that the criteria being used to take on patients are entirely financially motivated.

Many people cannot afford to pay for private dental care yet, having paid the full complement of tax and National Insurance contributions, feel they are entitled to NHS treatment. Will the Minister advise the House on those matters?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I advised the House during last Tuesday's debate on access to Health Service dental treatment. I invested £7 million in Health Service dentistry to assist specifically with the payment of overhead costs. The investment was also to help with vocational training, and it has been welcomed.

At present, we are negotiating a new dental contract with the British Dental Association, and I hope that those negotiations will conclude sooner rather than later. That is one measure required in order to allow local commissioning, in which a local board or trust determines an area's dental needs and commissions contracts to deal with those needs. The focus will be on prevention rather than on the "drill and fill" contract that is in place at present.

In some areas, issues still remain around Health Service dentistry deficits and dental services not being used. I am also examining the possibility of private tendering provisions for areas where people have difficulty accessing NHS dentists.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister partly answered the question that Patsy McGlone raised, and he is correct. During last week's debate, the Minister assured the House that negotiations with BDA were taking place to meet dentists' contractual arrangements. The Minister said that that will happen sooner rather than later, but that is not a reassurance. Will the Minister be more specific?

The Minister said that gaps exist in dental-care provision. Is a strategy planned? He mentioned private-practice treatment, so will he expand on how gaps are to be filled? At present, inequalities exist when it comes to accessing dental services. Where people live often dictates the level of provision — it is dentistry by postcode. The House needs assurances that gaps will be filled.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During last Tuesday's debate, I

indicated that negotiations with the British Dental Association — the industry's trade union — were ongoing. I am keen to see those concluded and expect the process to be completed next year. However, negotiations take time.

The inequality of access to dental services across Northern Ireland is not acceptable. In certain areas, it is almost impossible to find a Health Service dentist. Therefore, I am examining the possibility of private tendering in order to deal with waiting lists and the needs of people who are affected by gaps in services, and to provide a service that patients are entitled to expect — a Health Service dentist to meet their needs.

Ms Lo: There appears to be a shortage of training placements for final-year dental students. What plans does the Minister have to provide adequate placements for students in order to enable them to finish their training?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: When students graduate from dental school, they spend one year training with a qualified dentist. However, it has emerged that local graduates have had to go further afield to receive training, because dentists here have said that it does not pay them to train graduates.

We are dealing with that problem by providing more investment for placements. Additional funds will be given to the practice allowance of £30,000 a year; grants and allowances of up to £19,000 a year will be provided for trainers; trainees' £29,000 salary will be paid for; and dentists will be allowed to keep the additional profits that trainees make for practices, which is estimated to be £40,000.

That, in conjunction with additional funding invested over the past two years, should increase the number of training places from 30 to 40. It is estimated that that should help make up the shortfall of seven places that was experienced in 2007-08.

3.00 pm

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway

1. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the current status of the proposed dualling of the Dungiven to Drumahoe A6 dual carriageway; and (ii) the expected start date.
(AQO 3212/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The A6 Derry to Dungiven scheme is being developed as one overall scheme, including the bypass at Dungiven.

The preferred corridor for the scheme has been selected, and public exhibitions were held in September 2007. Roads Service has examined a range of possible routes for the new road within, or close to, that corridor. Those routes will be presented for consultation during a further round of community information events, which are to be held in Dungiven and Drumahoe at the end of May 2008.

Following a further detailed appraisal, I expect to announce a preferred route for the new road in spring 2009. Subsequent in-depth examination of the preferred route will conclude with the publication of draft statutory procedures and an environmental statement in autumn 2010, and a public inquiry into the proposals in 2011. The timing of the construction of the dual carriageway will be determined by the outcome of that inquiry, but I am advised by Roads Service that a positive inquiry result would allow it to be on the ground 12 to 18 months after that.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that, earlier in 2008, some rumours were circulating that the Londonderry to Dungiven dualling would not go ahead, and there were some indications that an alternative route via Ballygawley and Strabane would be chosen. Does the Minister's answer mean that the Londonderry to Dungiven dualling is categorically and unequivocally proceeding to the timescale that he has provided, and that it will not be substituted by a second-hand or alternative route that would not provide direct access to Belfast for the people who live in the north-west?

The Minister for Regional Development: I assure the Member of that. I have not received or seen any alternative proposition. The Member will be aware of the A5 route, which is being developed between Monaghan and Derry. At no stage has anyone suggested to me that the other side of Lough Neagh would be used as an alternative route between Derry and Belfast. I am working to the timescale and the proposal that I have outlined today, which I have also outlined to the people of Dungiven and to Limavady Borough Council. I assure the Member that the Department is sticking with that timescale and proposal.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh míle maith agat. I am aware that the dual carriageway must be settled, including the vesting of land, before the Dungiven bypass can be built. I am happy that the Department will make the bypass the first part of the construction of the dual carriageway. However, the Toome bypass was built without the settlement of stretches of carriageway on either side of it, the vesting of property, or settling with farmers or landowners.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You must ask a supplementary question, Mr Brolly.

Mr Brolly: Why can the Dungiven bypass not be decoupled from the dual carriageway?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am tempted to do as Mr McGimpsey suggested and respond to the Member in writing. I was not in office when the Toome bypass scheme and the subsequent A6 road to Castledawson were devised, but I understand that those were two separate schemes. The A6 scheme from Derry to the Belfast side of Dungiven, however, is part of one scheme.

At the current stage of the process, the project's statutory processes would not advance any quicker if it were to be taken forward by dividing it into two separate schemes. As the Member correctly said, after those schemes and the public inquiry are complete and procurement for the building of the road takes place, a strong argument can be made that the strongest priority is for building the bypass around Dungiven because that is where the congestion and pollution issues are most acute. At that stage, there would be strong merit for considering going ahead with that part of the scheme first.

Mr Dallat: Recently, I have been accused of mud-slinging on the issue of transport in the north-west. Is the Minister absolutely sure that, before the end of this Assembly mandate in 2011, the people of Dungiven and Ballykelly will have the bypasses that they rightly deserve, and which were neglected in the past? I say that with all sincerity, given that the most recent readings of CO₂ in Dungiven are higher than ever.

The Minister for Regional Development: I am fully aware of the pollution issues in Dungiven, and I know that Limavady Borough Council is preparing a report on that matter, which will also involve the Department of the Environment. The key way to resolve those pollution issues is to bypass Dungiven. I am happy to give the Member that assurance. I have outlined the time frame for that scheme, and the Department intends to stick to that and to deliver it as quickly as possible, without delay.

Since being elected to office, I have said that on several occasions; yet some people still say that the scheme will not happen, it will be delayed or, as Mr Campbell said, there is an altogether new scheme that is designed to take people around the world for the sport of it before they get to Belfast. I will keep issuing reassurances and continue to accept the question in the spirit in which it was intended; however, I hope that the Member accepts the reassurances in the spirit in which they are intended. The scheme will happen, and I intend for the Department to deliver it.

Waterside Railway Station

2. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the amount of money spent on the refurbishment of Waterside railway station in the

past three years, and the amount of spending planned for the next three years. (AQO 3260/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In the past three years, no refurbishment work has been carried out at Waterside railway station; however, maintenance work at the station is ongoing at an average cost of £8,000 per annum.

As part of Translink's new rail service programme to upgrade stations and halts in order to comply with disability discrimination legislation, work costing £290,000 will be completed later this year. That will provide Waterside railway station with tactile paving, improved lighting and signage, improved toilets and general painting. Longer-term options for the future of the Derry station will be considered as part of the planning process for the relay of the railway line between Derry and Coleraine.

Mrs M Bradley: As the Minister knows, Derry railway station is a disgrace. Will the Minister outline any discussions that he has had with Ilex about a timescale for a new railway station?

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not undertaken any work with Ilex in relation to relocating the Derry rail terminal. However, NIR has consulted with Ilex about proposals to install a direct footbridge link to Foyle side. Plans for a rail terminal may be presented to the Department, and they would be considered in light of the funding that has been made available for the Derry line in the latest investment strategy. Of course, as I said in my first answer, provision of a new railway station in Derry is an option that will be considered when planning for the upgrade of the line between Coleraine and Derry.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister assure Members that, under the proposed improvements, all railway stations on the Belfast to Londonderry line will benefit from upgraded facilities?

The Minister for Regional Development: A range of improvements for all railway stations is required under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, and there are further plans for some stations, such as Ballymoney railway station on the Belfast to Derry line. The improvements planned for Waterside railway station may be included in the proposed work on the Coleraine to Derry line. Much as I would like to give assurances to upgrade every railway station along the line, given the finances on which we currently operate, that would be a bit ambitious. Nevertheless, if a case can be made and investment secured, we will attempt to improve track and station facilities generally.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt don Aire as an fhreagra sin.

Will the Minister outline any discussions that he has had about bringing a rail link from Sligo to the north-west via Donegal in order to increase rail travel throughout the island of Ireland?

The Minister for Regional Development: Further to representation from the Northern Corridor Railways Group, I have agreed to a study that will consider long-term social, physical and economic redevelopment of the railway throughout the north-west. Later this month, I intend to bring that to the attention of the North/South Ministerial Council and to suggest that, when available, the study's findings are shared with the Council. It would be up to the Southern Government to decide whether a similar exercise might be appropriate for Donegal and Sligo.

Free Travel: Delay

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his reasons for delaying the introduction of free travel for people over the age of 60 until the end of the year. (AQO 3265/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: There is no delay. Subject to the outcome of consultations, in October, I intend to extend free travel, as I stated in my letter to all MLAs dated 18 December 2007.

Mr McCarthy: Undoubtedly, the Minister is aware of the great disappointment of many people in our community that the SmartPass has not been available for use this summer to everyone aged 60 years and over. Will he use that extra time available to him to ensure that, when free travel for all people aged 60 years and over is introduced, it will be enjoyed throughout the island? Furthermore, will the Minister ensure that the SmartPass application procedure is more people-friendly? Some people have experienced difficulties with identification.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member have his SmartPass?

The Minister for Regional Development: I believe that they are asking the Member whether he has an interest to declare. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCarthy: I have a SmartPass, but my wife does not have a SmartPass. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister for Regional Development: Unfortunately, my remit does not extend to marriage guidance. *[Laughter.]*

I fail to understand why there is disappointment; the timescale outlined on 18 December 2007 has been adhered to. Some people may not have read my letter correctly, thought that the scheme was being extended earlier and now think that it has been delayed.

On numerous occasions, I have had to repeat that there is no delay. The budget was agreed only in February

and consultation that began in April will come back at the end of June; the closing date for responses is Monday 9 June. Time is also required to develop ticketing software for SmartPasses. From previous experience, writing, validating and rolling out new software for ticket machines takes six months. There are 70,000 applications expected, one of which, I am sure, will be from the Member's good lady. Therefore, it takes time to get this type of project in order. The scheme has not been delayed — it matches the timescale that was outlined.

The Member may be aware that the current scheme for free travel at age 65 does not co-ordinate with the scheme in the South, where the age limit is 66. That creates a difficulty in extending the new 60-plus scheme to the South. Therefore, the Department does not plan to extend the scheme to the South.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for providing information on the scheme. Given that the scheme was introduced by a DUP Minister, could the Minister provide an assessment — *[Interruption.]* It was certainly not introduced by any Members from the Ulster Unionist Party.

Will the Minister provide an assessment of the benefits of the scheme and undertake to assess the uptake of the scheme? There is a disparity in the provision of public transport — in rural areas, there is not the same frequency of public transport service as there is in urban areas. Therefore, it is vital that there is a maximum uptake of the free-travel scheme in rural areas. Will the Minister give an assurance that — with his Executive colleagues — he will carry out an assessment and that action will be taken to address any deficiencies in rural areas?

The Minister for Regional Development: A pattern is emerging: when I spend money, the Minister of Finance and Personnel is responsible, but if I do not have money in my departmental budget, I am responsible.

The Executive were keen to extend the free-travel scheme from 65-plus to 60-plus. I accept the Member's point about uptake. From the experience of the 65-plus SmartPass scheme, people in rural areas were less inclined to take up the offer because the transport service was not as good as in urban areas. For example, there is better access to public transport in the eastern side of the North, particularly the rail service. We have discussed the issue with organisations that represent senior citizens, and we will discuss it with other Executive colleagues and take advice from other interested groups to ensure that there is a maximum take-up of the scheme.

One benefit of the scheme is that it reduces social exclusion by providing greater mobility, which also contributes to health and well-being. In many cases, the scheme gives people more freedom to travel and,

perhaps, to enjoy retirement more fully. Therefore, it is essential that the scheme is properly promoted and to ensure that the uptake is as high as possible. A range of organisations and Departments can help us to do that, and we will ask for assistance where it is available.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister mentioned the age limit of the free-travel scheme in the South. Can he confirm that his counterpart in the South has refused to lower the age limit of the scheme there?

The Minister for Regional Development: The decision to reduce the age from 65 to 60 was taken by the Executive as part of the Budget discussions. What happens in the South is a matter for the Ministers there and their budgetary plans. The age limit in the South is 66, which worked when there was just a one-year differential between the two schemes and meant that we could secure an all-Ireland approach.

Bigger problems are created when the age limit is reduced to 60, because free transport extends into other Departments in the South. Although there are currently no plans for an all-Ireland approach to the extension of the free transport scheme, I would be happy to talk to the Minister for Transport.

3.15 pm

A5 Upgrade

4. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the discussions he has had with the Strategic Investment Board concerning the upgrade of the A5 route from Derry/Londonderry to Ballygawley. (AQO 3273/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Following the Irish Government's intention to contribute £400 million to help to fund major roads programmes in the North, the Executive confirmed their acceptance, in principle, to develop two major roads projects: the A5 Derry to Ballygawley road and the A8 Belfast to Larne road. Development work on the proposed A5 scheme is continuing apace and is on target to meet the first key milestone of the announcement of the preferred corridor by late 2008. My Department's Roads Service liaises regularly with officials from the Strategic Investment Board about the scheme and other projects that are included in my Department's investment delivery plans for roads. Further meetings are planned in the near future.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister confirm the extent of the Southern Government's contribution to the scheme? Will he also confirm that the road will be of at least dual carriageway standard all the way to the border at Aughnacloy?

The Minister for Regional Development: The road will be of dual carriageway standard from Derry to Aughnacloy. The total contribution from the Dublin Government to both schemes was £400 million, which will be divided between the A5 and the A8 schemes. The funding is being allocated to the A5 scheme for ease of spending purposes, but the contribution will be spread across both schemes.

Mr P Ramsey: Will the Minister tell the House whether the A5 project outlined has the same parallel priority and importance as the A6?

The Minister for Regional Development: Yes, it has. Both schemes are progressing in parallel. The A5 scheme is the biggest stretch of dual carriageway ever built on this island — more than 80 km — and it is an important scheme for the north-west and for the entire island because of access between Donegal and Dublin. One scheme will not take precedence over the other. Both schemes are progressing in parallel, and it is intended that both schemes will greatly improve access to and from the north-west.

Dr Deeny: I thank the Minister for clarifying that the A5 dual carriageway will run all the way to Aughnacloy, as the question suggests that it stops at Ballygawley. The road turns from the N2 into the A5 as it crosses the border. Some of the questions that I intended to ask have already been answered. However, will the Minister tell the House whether there is a time frame for the project? The Minister previously made a promise about the A4, which is a very dangerous road. The A5 is also dangerous, so the sooner those two roads are operating, the better.

Will the Minister inform the House of the time frame for linking those two roads? For Members who are not familiar with the geography of the project, the road will link Dungannon to Ballygawley on the A4 and link the jointly funded A5 project from Aughnacloy all the way to Londonderry. Does the Minister intend that, in future, the country will pay road tolls as they do in the South?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of the current state of the roads and of the road between Ballygawley and Aughnacloy. I travelled that road twice in the past couple of days between the north-west and the south-east of Ulster.

Some improvement works are already being carried out between Aughnacloy and Ballygawley. It is anticipated that those works will factor in to the overall roads project between Aughnacloy and Derry.

The major milestones in the timescale for the A5 project are: the announcement of the preferred corridor in late 2008; the announcement of a preferred route in mid-2009; and the publication of draft Statutory Orders in 2010. After that, there will be a public inquiry, which will affect the timescale of the project. The

intention is that, for a project of this scale, it will be delivered in one of the quickest time frames undertaken by the Department for Regional Development and our partners on the Southern side. We will use the experience gained on our joint approach to the building of the Newry to Dundalk road. That is the time frame.

The ability to introduce toll roads remains on the Department's books, so to speak; but that objective is not being considered seriously, and certainly not in relation to either of the aforementioned projects.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementary questions must pertain to the main question.

Bus Lanes

5. **Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline whether enforcement measures are to be introduced to ensure that only designated vehicles can use bus lanes, given the recent addition of a new bus lane on the Ormeau Road in Belfast.

(AQO 3298/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service is aware of the need for effective enforcement of bus lanes to ensure that bus speeds are optimised. Although Roads Service is responsible for the enforcement of waiting restrictions on clearways, the PSNI is responsible for enforcement measures against vehicles that enter bus lanes illegally.

Following the introduction of the new bus lane on the Ormeau Road on 7 April 2008, Roads Service officials contacted the PSNI and requested that additional enforcement be provided at that particular location. The PSNI confirmed that additional resources will be allocated to keep the area under review. Roads Service is considering whether it may be appropriate to decriminalise moving offences in bus lanes. Such a move would require the agreement of the PSNI and a change in legislation. It would enable Roads Service to enforce all contraventions of bus lanes.

Mrs Hanna: I thank the Minister for that response. Has he considered car sharing as a way of improving traffic flow? People could enter into a formal arrangement with one another to share a car and thereby use the faster lane.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member may be aware that the Department launched Car Share Day at Queen's University in her constituency this year. The university operates its own car-share club, with the support of the Department through its Travelwise schemes. The Department encourages car sharing and helps large organisations and institutions, such as Queen's University, Departments or other big employers, to introduce formal car-share packages. Drivers are encouraged to make contact with other

people who may be travelling on the same route to and from work.

Car sharing is very much part of an overall package to reduce the number of cars congesting the city. As I said, Queen's University has operated a very successful scheme in South Belfast, and our joint public launch of Car Share Day a few weeks ago is part of our attempt to encourage other organisations to operate similar schemes.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answer. Has he or his Department consulted the PSNI regarding enforcement of the legislation, and, if so, has the PSNI given any guarantees that resources will be made available to enforce the legislation?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in my earlier response, the PSNI is responsible for ensuring that drivers do not enter and use bus lanes illegally. Roads Service and NCP are responsible for dealing with cars that are parked on urban clearways, thereby blocking lanes.

Roads Service contacted the PSNI recently to advise it that a new bus lane was being opened on the Ormeau Road, and it asked the PSNI to pay particular attention to that area. My officials have visited the bus lane on several occasions since it opened, and they have observed the PSNI stopping vehicles that are using the lane illegally.

As I said, Roads Service and the Department are considering whether Roads Service should have a role in dealing not only with stationary vehicles in bus lanes, but with moving vehicles in bus lanes too. That would require the agreement of the PSNI and legislative change. We will continue to liaise with the PSNI to ensure that it is effective in its efforts to stop drivers using bus lanes.

Mr Cobain: Carmel Hanna has raised a very important issue. Most of us are worried about the infrastructural changes that would be required to operate a rapid-transport system in Belfast. Introducing such a system would involve removing a number of car lanes in the city centre. How would that work?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member is Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development, so he will know that South Belfast is not involved in the initial schemes — the proposed route went as far as Queen's University. Of course, if a rapid-transport system is to be effective, lanes will have to be made available for it, which will have an impact on car users. That is why a package of measures is being developed to reduce car usage in the city: car sharing, park and ride, quality bus corridors, rapid transit, and residents parking — another hot topic at the moment. Undoubtedly, a rapid-transit system will have an impact on the number of lanes available to cars.

If we want to reduce congestion, we have a responsibility to provide better public transport and better schemes that result in fewer cars coming into the city in the

morning. There will, no doubt, be a conflict between rapid-transit propositions and existing car lanes, but that is a conflict that the Assembly will have to get its head around. There are some difficult decisions to be faced if we want to provide better public transport and encourage less use of cars, reduce our carbon footprint, and have a healthier city and a healthier environment in the city — all of which will have a negative impact on car usage and car access to the city.

Tubber Road, Kircubbin

6. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps being taken to address the serious surface and verges deterioration on the Tubber Road, Kircubbin. (AQO 3237/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As I advised in my response to the Member's questions earlier this year on the condition of the Tubber Road, Roads Service confirms that the carriageway surface is free from major defects, and its overall condition is acceptable. However, the road will continue to be subject to regular inspection and repairs, carried out in accordance with Roads Service's maintenance guidelines.

Mr Shannon: I should be quite happy to take the Minister down that road; his car would be lucky to survive it. With respect, it cannot be said that the road is in any better condition. That being the case, will the Minister say how much the Department has spent on that road and whether its officials have been down the road recently? If they have, they will have noticed the clear erosion, decay and deterioration along the road edges, and that the verges are falling away. The people who live along that road and who use it daily, as well as the many others who use the road, are asking the Minister what money will be spent, when it will be spent and when improvements will take place. They will not accept a reply that the road is acceptable, because it is very far from that.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member will be aware that we do not have as much as we would like in the roads maintenance budget, and Roads Service continually struggles with trying to, pardon the pun, spread the roads maintenance budget across all roads. There is a substantial rural road network, and Roads Service deals with problems and issues that arise on the roads network from all parts of the North. I do not have the figures to hand on what has been spent on that road, or when it was last inspected. However, I will get those figures and respond to the Member in writing.

Mr K Robinson: Has the Minister taken any action for the provision of service strips at the sides of all new roads, and on any existing roads such as the Tubber Road in Kircubbin — I had to get that one in or Mr Shannon would tell me off — where possible, to minimise disruption caused by the need for roads to be opened to

lay cables or pipes for public amenities such as electricity, gas, or private telephone or cable TV installations?

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to the Tubber Road in Kircubbin, there is a protocol for the opening of roads by utility companies, and that protocol has to be adhered to strictly. Part of that protocol is, obviously, to reinstate the road in a condition that is acceptable to Roads Service. In relation to the issues that the Member raises, I can have that protocol, and a copy of the Hansard report, examined, and if there is any more detail that the Department can provide him with in relation to the matter, we will do so.

Mr O'Loan: I want to support Mr Shannon in relation to Tubber Road, Kircubbin. Does the Minister agree that the condition of many roads is unacceptable and that bad road conditions —

Mr Deputy Speaker: A supplementary to the main question.

Mr O'Loan: I did think that I was asking a supplementary to the main question. I ask you to listen on, Mr Deputy Speaker. Bad road conditions can contribute to road accidents, and, therefore, the lack of an adequate roads maintenance budget is contributing to death and serious injury on the roads.

The Minister for Regional Development: May I say at the outset that it would be remiss of me not to say that I will be in the Ards Peninsula tomorrow, so I might have an opportunity to look at the Tubber Road.

Members will be well aware of the amount that Roads Service has estimated is required for the roads maintenance budget, and how much the budgetary process has allocated for that over the next three years. Roads Service has been able to supplement that budget in previous years from moneys acquired from in-year monitoring, and will continue to try to access money through in-year monitoring, because Roads Service can often spend money on projects quickly, which has been to its benefit over the years.

I concur with the Member; roads maintenance will always require extra funding. However, although road condition must be considered a contributory factor, the vast majority of accidents on good and bad roads are, unfortunately, caused by driver behaviour.

3.30 pm

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Public Housing Stock

1. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the steps she is taking to improve the sustainability of public housing stock.

(AQO 3337/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):

The Housing Executive and housing associations are moving towards an assurance that their properties meet the recognised decent homes standard, an essential element of which is an increase in the thermal performance of dwellings to ensure a higher level of sustainability. A code for sustainable homes has been developed to enable a step change in sustainable home-building practice in order to achieve a six-star rating, which, in the future, will mean a carbon-free home.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister ensure that newbuilds that are planned for the next few years are low-carbon-footprint housing?

The Minister for Social Development: The Department requires that newbuild schemes that are included in the social-housing development programme make provision in the design brief for an eco-homes rating of “very good” or better, certified by a Building Research Establishment licensed assessor. In 2008, it will become mandatory for all new social-housing dwellings to achieve a minimum three-star rating in the code for sustainable homes.

On 26 February 2008, I announced that Northern Ireland's first eco-village, comprising social and affordable houses that are built to the highest standards of sustainability, will be established at the former Grosvenor Barracks in Enniskillen. Later this month, I will meet a consortium of housing associations on site to advance that project. The housing that will be provided on that site will benefit from a range of technologies, including wind, solar, ground-source pumps and water recycling.

At present, zero-carbon-footprint housing is relatively expensive, and we all have a responsibility to ensure best value for money in the provision of social and affordable housing. However, it is essential to promote sustainability in housing, and the Grosvenor project will be an exemplar development in that regard.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister detail the steps that she has taken to ensure that co-ownership housing is available in Derry to people who are seeking affordable social housing? Will she provide a timescale within which new applications will be acceptable and facilitated? I do not like to stand up without mentioning the Stand up for Derry campaign.

The Minister for Social Development: Although that supplementary question does not relate specifically to the substantive question, I will, nonetheless, answer in detail. There has been much ill-informed comment about co-ownership, and I want to set the record straight. Co-ownership continues to be a success. It has helped more than 20,000 people become homeowners, and last year, under direct rule, the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association (NICH) received

a grant of £4.2 million, which I increased to £18.8 million through in-year monitoring.

NICHA used that grant to respond to an unprecedented level of demand and helped more than 900 people into home ownership. That was the highest level for several years and almost treble the previous year's total of 325. This year, NICHA will be allocated a grant of £15 million, and it will use that grant and external finance to help another 500 people on to the first rung of the property ladder. That is in line with targets outlined in the Programme for Government, which were agreed by Ms Anderson's Sinn Féin colleagues on the Executive.

I assure the Member that we are on course to achieve the co-ownership goals that were set out in the Department's new housing agenda.

Mr Ford: Although I welcome the Minister's remarks about co-ownership, I will try to return to the original subject of the question. The Minister has outlined some positive and desirable plans for the future sustainability of new housing stock. Bearing in mind the serious increases in fuel prices and the huge and increasing problem of fuel poverty in society, what can the Minister promise the Assembly that she will do to meet the needs of existing tenants and owner-occupiers who are in dire fuel poverty and whose position is likely to get worse in the coming months?

The Minister for Social Development: I fully understand and empathise with the sentiments that the Member expressed. I will chair an urgently called meeting tomorrow with the inter-departmental committee on fuel poverty, which will be attended by members of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group. I have asked the members of that committee to bring their proposals to the meeting.

Although I hold responsibility for the alleviation of fuel poverty, energy tariffs are a matter for the energy regulator and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with whom discussions are ongoing. Coincidentally, the energy regulator will attend tomorrow's meeting. It is clear that although fuel costs in Northern Ireland are extremely high, we have lower levels of income.

Review of Public Administration

2. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the approach she is taking to the Review of Public Administration, in terms of (i) supporting a new vision for local government; and (ii) transferring functions to local government.
(AQO 3336/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I believe in a vision for strong local government. I have delivered a sizeable package of urban regeneration, community

development and housing functions for transfer to local government. Each of those transferred functions will have a significant budget attached to them. I have offered up more than any other Department. I will work closely with the Minister of the Environment to ensure that that package is implemented successfully and that a new vision for local government is fully realised. I will put comprehensive programme-management structures in place to assist with the transfer process.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answer. What scope is there for the transfer of functions to local government ahead of the 2011 target date?

The Minister for Social Development: Having committed in principle to transferring significant functions, it is only right to examine the ways in which those transfers can be best managed. Therefore, I am exploring ways in which some of my Department's functions can be transferred well in advance of 2011. It may be that some functions could transfer, in whole or in part, without the need for the new council boundaries to be established. It might be possible to pilot other functions at local government level. That would provide valuable learning and experience, both for DSD and other Departments. That would help to ease the transition from central to local government and inform the wider transfer as it evolves.

Mr Campbell: The Minister said that she believed in a vision for strong local government. I imagine and hope that that belief would be shared by everyone. Historically, there were nationalists in Northern Ireland who were suspicious of unionist-controlled councils. More recently, it is the case that there are unionists who are suspicious of nationalist-controlled councils. Will the Minister assure the House that she will support good governance arrangements in local government both in her own area and across Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member knows that I support strong local government. As a current member of Down District Council, I have always supported power sharing. The SDLP has pump-primed the notion of power sharing since 1973, and we always ensured that the DUP was given its allocation or quotient on council committees from the very beginning, even when others in the council chamber were not prepared to support such a partnership arrangement.

My party and I always support good governance arrangements, because, after all, the SDLP was the pioneer of power sharing.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for her earlier reply. Given that many responsibilities will transfer from her Department to local government, will she undertake to ensure that the money to fund such responsibilities will also transfer?

The Minister for Social Development: That issue requires further investigation. However, the functions will transfer, and I will take up the issue of finance with the Minister of the Environment.

Reducing Benefit Claimants

3. **Mr Burnside** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her strategies for reducing the number of families with children that claim at least one key benefit. (AQO 3245/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I intend to ensure that all those who are entitled to benefits and allowances receive all moneys to which they are entitled. The Member's question raises the important issue of child and family poverty. Tackling poverty is a priority for the Executive, and one of the major concerns and central pillars of my Department is tackling poverty and disadvantage. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister leads on the broad anti-poverty strategy, and my Department makes a considerable contribution to that programme.

In particular, my Department works to support individuals and families in need through the Social Security Agency, child-support arrangements and social housing. It also works to address disadvantaged areas through its leadership on neighbourhood renewal and its support for the community and voluntary sectors.

Ultimately, the success of the broader anti-poverty strategy, and my Department's contribution to it, should result in a reduction in the number of families with children that claim at least one key benefit — not because the benefits system has been changed to exclude them, but because they will have moved out of the benefits system.

Mr Burnside: I am concerned because, when the Minister took office, around 6,000 children were in poverty in my constituency of South Antrim, according to the statistical information and child-poverty criteria. That number seems to be completely flat and unchanging. Unless the Minister changes the system, the Department must re-examine the statistics and the criteria that define child poverty. There appears to be a bottom level of child poverty that we are not impacting on in any way, unless we play around cleverly with the statistics, which is not the way to deal with the problem. When will the Minister deal with the 6,000 children who are in poverty in South Antrim?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Burnside for giving me that information, as well as for his question. I will have that matter investigated. As he will be aware, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister leads on policy matters in relation to child poverty, and its Committee is currently conducting an inquiry, to which I have already made a detailed

initial response. My officials have already made a submission to the OFMDFM Committee, which is under the chairmanship of Mr Burnside's party colleague Mr Kennedy, and which will publish a report on child poverty.

I have no problem with examining the relationship between child poverty and benefits. I will be launching a second benefit-uptake campaign, for this financial year, in the next few weeks, and I hope that it will target those in greatest need. No doubt it will reach those families with children who are in need. The basic issue is that we must help those who are in need and must target need where it is felt most.

Mr McQuillan: Will the Minister examine ways to reduce poverty in rural areas?

The Minister for Social Development: In so far as Mr McQuillan's question relates to the benefits issue, I will shortly launch the benefit-uptake campaign for this year, which will deal with those who are marginalised. However, the issue of rural poverty — and its impact on rural families — is a matter for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

3.45 pm

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister elaborate on her campaign to ensure the maximum uptake of benefits, especially by families who may not be claiming the benefits to which they are entitled?

The Minister for Social Development: In my response to Mr Burnside's question, I indicated clearly that, since taking up office, my intention has been to ensure that resources are targeted at those most in need. The benefits system does that, and the Department provides a range of services to ensure that people are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits. Last year, I was happy to launch the benefit uptake campaign, which targeted 230,000 older people and focused on people with a disability or a mental-health illness. Later this year, I will launch a similar, more targeted programme for this financial year.

Lest anyone in the House is in any doubt, my Department is having success in this area; and I am determined to build on that success. I hope that every Member in the House will encourage people in their constituencies who are in need to apply for the benefits to which they are entitled. There is an onus on Members to do that.

Community Development for Minority Ethnic Groups

4. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider interventions to assist ethnic minority groupings in community development. (AQO 3248/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department continues to provide community development support for ethnic minority organisations. The provision has been made as a result of applications to my Department's funding programmes, which are designed to address deprivation and develop the community and voluntary sector's general capability.

I have actively engaged with ethnic minority groups. Today, I met a delegation from Malayali, a group from the province of Kerala in South India. I have also met the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, the Chinese Welfare Association, and representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Bahá'í faiths.

I am pleased that my Department's funding programmes have been able to support initiatives involving those minority ethnic communities. For example, in April, I committed almost half a million pounds from the neighbourhood renewal investment fund to projects — costing a total of £1.5 million — to enable the Chinese Welfare Association to build a new community resource centre on the Ormeau Road in Belfast. The Chinese community is one of our most established ethnic groups and the Chinese Welfare Association has a key role to play in supporting its community and promoting Chinese culture. I have also provided funding for the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities and for local organisations such as Strabane Ethnic Community Organisation.

Ethnic minorities make a valuable contribution to our economy, and they have every right to be at the heart of our communities. Last Friday, as part of community relations week and my commitment to building a shared future — to which I hope everyone in the House subscribes — I launched the Housing Executive's anti-racism charter.

Mrs D Kelly: I am sure that the Minister will join me in condemning the recent racist attacks and hostility shown towards ethnic minorities in Banbridge, Cookstown, and elsewhere.

The Minister for Social Development: I could not agree more with the Member for Upper Bann. I was absolutely appalled to learn of those attacks on ethnic minorities. Recently, I met Mrs Kelly's Assembly colleague, Mr Savage, who raised a similar issue with me. Such attacks are totally unacceptable, and everyone in the House must take a stand against them. I am committed to the development of good relations between all communities on this island — whether Catholic, Protestant, Latvian, Polish, British or Irish. The essential principles of equality and fair treatment for all our people are immutable. Ethnic minorities face additional challenges to those faced by the local population, such as coming to terms with a new culture and, in many cases, a new language.

Far too often, there is prejudice and antagonism. I am sure that Members have heard the arguments that migrants take all the jobs; that their families overwhelm our public services; and that they are changing Northern Ireland into a foreign land. All Members will agree that that is nonsense that is bred from ignorance and arrogance. Northern Ireland needs the economic and cultural benefits that inward migration brings. I am sure that all Members will join in my condemnation of any act of harassment or intimidation directed at ethnic minorities.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her understanding of ethnic-minority communities and her support for new communities.

Newer ethnic-minority communities — such as the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian communities — are not well-established, and, therefore, they have not accessed, for example, DSD's neighbourhood renewal funding. Those groups must be targeted, particularly by the voluntary and community unit, in order to help them to establish themselves and to provide them with a voice.

The Minister for Social Development: I take on board what Ms Lo has said. There are 36 neighbourhood renewal partnerships in Northern Ireland. Many of them are in major urban centres such as Belfast and Derry, although some are in smaller towns. I hope that neighbourhood renewal partnerships, along with my officials, will ensure that projects and programmes are implemented that reflect minority communities' needs. If Ms Lo has any particular issues or details, she should write to me.

All that those ethnic minorities are doing is what many Irish people did for generations. They have gone overseas to work purely for economic purposes. They want to help their families put food on the table, to ensure that they have a future and to improve their lives.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for her response, which, as always, was detailed and positive. She mentioned contact with different ethnic minorities. Does your Department have direct contact with local councils?

I ask because each council has a community officer who is aware of ethnic-minority groups in his or her council area. Has the Minister made direct contact through councils with community officers, to ascertain which ethnic minorities live in their areas? My constituency of Strangford has a growing number of ethnic minorities from across Europe.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Shannon for his question. In designated neighbourhood renewal areas or designated areas at risk — such as Scrabo in Newtownards — direct contact takes place between my officials, who work specifically on neighbourhood renewal schemes, and council staff. If the Member has particular issues, I invite him to write

to me, so that I can raise them and ensure that they are fully investigated.

Shared Future Housing

5. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans for shared future housing for both new and existing housing developments. (AQO 3251/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I recently visited the shared-future scheme at Carran Crescent in Fermanagh, and I was most impressed with what I saw. I am committed to the concept. A similar scheme under way in Sion Mills, and that is scheduled to be ready for occupation later this year. On 1 May, I visited the site of another proposed scheme at Loughbrickland. Much work on that scheme is already complete.

As part of the new housing agenda, I said that we would try to extend the shared-future-housing model for existing schemes. Taking the lead, the Housing Executive will adopt a community-based approach to supporting local communities to designate their social-housing areas as shared-future neighbourhoods.

Most people in Northern Ireland aspire to a shared future. I was surprised last week, when one of the participants at a conference that I attended — a Member of the Assembly — did not fully subscribe to a shared future. It is worth noting that.

We all know that a shared future must be built and that its creation does not happen by chance. In all areas of social and economic life, not just housing, we must actively promote shared-future solutions and initiatives.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge and welcome the fact that the Minister is passionately committed to putting this matter at the heart of her housing agenda. Might I suggest that, in taking the matter forward, she seek consultations with the Community Relations Council? At its annual conference last week — at which I, the Deputy Speaker and other Members of the Assembly spoke — a workshop was held on shared housing in a shared society. Consultations with the council might enable the Minister to accelerate her clear agenda. In the day that is in it, when people in another part of this island are acknowledging our shared past at the Boyne, will the Minister elaborate on how she is putting a shared future at the heart of her ministerial agenda?

The Minister for Social Development: I have met the Community Relations Council on several occasions. My Department maintains a close working relationship with the council, and I believe that that will continue. I have no doubt that I will be having further meetings with the council, because we share similar aims, namely building a shared future.

I have also met numerous groups and residents living at interfaces and have heard at first hand their experiences of a life of segregation. Armed with that information and that artillery, so to speak, I am very much charged with the need to build a shared future — something that everybody in this Assembly should subscribe to.

With respect to my reasons for putting a shared future at the heart of policy development in DSD, there are three main reasons. First, I am convinced that we can only move from the sectarian conflict that has bedevilled Northern Ireland by creating a society where all our people and communities have the same life chances and feel comfortable and safe together — at home, at work and at play. That is a real shared future. That does not mean relinquishing one's political identity. It means respecting another person's political identity and religious difference; unity and diversity in true form.

Secondly, my Department is all about tackling disadvantage. The most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland are faced by a range of environmental, physical and social factors that tie their communities into a cycle of deprivation: poor health, poor education and isolation from services. The influence of sectarianism is very often a feature of and blight on these communities. We must address this division as keenly as we address the other factors of disadvantage or we will not break this cycle of deprivation.

Thirdly, in keeping with the Executive's priority of economic development, I recognise that we need to develop and attract people with the talent and skills to build a knowledge-based economy. We also need to provide the stability for that economy to grow and to attract inward investment.

The shared future strategy contributes to safer, more stable neighbourhoods and promotes a more inclusive society while recognising that trust and safety will ultimately dictate the pace of change. These are my reasons for placing it at the heart of policy within the Department for Social Development.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell this House the location of the 30 areas where she intends to roll out the extension of her shared housing development strategy and whether she intends to consult the residents of those areas before moving to implement that strategy? Does she recognise the sterling work carried out in interface areas by residents on both sides of the political divide, and is she not concerned that any proposal to impose shared areas could be detrimental to the welfare of residents? Would it not be better to develop strategies to break the mental barriers of sectarianism, rather than act prematurely in pushing through an ill-thought-out strategy?

4.00 pm

The Minister for Social Development: The Member obviously does not understand the basic premise of a shared future.

Mr F McCann: I lived at an interface.

The Minister for Social Development: We all live in Northern Ireland; we are all a product of the legacy of the past. It is hoped that Fra McCann will work for the building of a shared future, rather than try to promote a policy of segregation.

Mr F McCann: I have been working for that for years.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister for Social Development: My party colleagues and I have always worked towards building a shared future and towards promoting unity in diversity — a concept from which Fra McCann could well learn examples.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That brings an end to Question Time. Members may take their ease for a couple of minutes before we resume the debate on the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My name was down to ask the Health Minister a supplementary question during Question Time. I was not called, and, afterwards, when I asked why I was not called, I was told that it was because I belong to the same party as the Minister who was answering the questions. I have sat in the House and listened to other Members ask questions of Ministers from their parties and receive answers. Why was I discriminated against? Is there a new rule for the House? Who makes the decisions in the House — civil servants or MLAs?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I will examine the Hansard report and respond later, if the Member is content with that.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, will you make your statement in the House?

Mr Speaker: I shall also consider that matter.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage

Debate resumed:

Mr Ford: The second group of amendments covers the kernel of the discussions that we have been having in this place — and over the airwaves and in corridors — over the past four and a half weeks. They cover two areas. Amendment Nos 2 and 7 relate to the issue of a chief commissioner and the staff reporting lines to that chief commissioner. Amendment Nos 9 and 10, which were tabled by the Alliance Party, and the SDLP's alternative amendment — amendment No 11 — relate to the voting procedures within the commission, specifically the need to move away from unanimity to some type of weighted-majority voting system to reduce the deadlock that will ensue if each commissioner holds a veto on every aspect of business.

We did not table the amendments out of any malice towards the Bill, but because we sought to make the Bill better, and we believed that we were fulfilling our role as a constructive opposition. Our amendments have stood the test of the debate, unlike the late amendment in Mr Donaldson's name, which, it appears, has taken four weeks for OFMDFM to dream up. Mr Donaldson's comments suggest that he is not on a solo run as a Minister, but it is unusual that the amendment is tabled in his name only — especially when one considers how the procedures of the House work.

As Dolores Kelly eloquently and accurately described it, it is a fig leaf. OFMDFM could have reviewed the victims' commissioner legislation almost a year ago, but did not. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister went ahead with the process of appointing a commissioner, in line with the legislation as it stood, until they ran in to problems at that famous after-the-Christmas-pud-meeting, when they realised that they were incapable of appointing a commissioner, and then started along the road of appointing a commission.

It has taken them from January to May to establish how that commission should operate. The delay has happened because entirely reasonable amendments seeking to improve the legislation have been tabled from this end of the Chamber, which caused utter consternation when it became clear that a large number of DUP Members agreed with the amendments tabled by Mrs D Kelly, Mrs Long and me, and had serious concerns about the Bill as it was originally presented. That is why we are debating those amendments today, along with the fig leaf amendment No 8, which attempts to cover up the differences in opinion that exist.

Considering the failure of OFMDFM to deal with those issues, it is little wonder that many victims and victims' groups are sceptical of seeing anything ever being produced by OFMDFM, and, frankly, that contributes to some Members' reluctance to allow that Department powers to regulate the workings of the commission. The operation of OFMDFM in relation to this issue so far would not give anyone any confidence that it is competent to deal with the operation of the commission.

Amendment No 8 not only fails to deal with the concerns expressed privately by Members of the DUP — including some quite senior Members — to their colleagues and to me over the last month, it fails to deal with points that were made on the airwaves by quite senior DUP members during that time. That must raise all kinds of questions about what the procedures of this House really are.

As I have already said, Dolores Kelly made the point that amendment No 8 is a fig leaf. I believe that she used the term “grubby”, which was the term that I originally used about this Bill. In fact, the proposed wording for paragraph 9 reads quite well — it is very eloquent in its phraseology, but it is still a grubby amendment dealing with the fact that a grubby Bill with a grubby purpose has been produced. The purpose of amendment No 8 is to cover up the differences that exist between the two parties that think they run this place, and that are so lacking in confidence that they run away from even debating their proposals until they are finally forced into doing so.

Sadly, only a few of the Back-Bench Members who are concerned about the way that the Bill was originally drafted are in the House, and even fewer participated in the debate — at least Mr Spratt had the courage to stand on his feet during the debate. It makes one wonder exactly what has been happening in private and how many arms have been twisted by the party Whips. There does not seem to be any agreement on the issue on which DUP Members are likely to be voting on in the near future. That question has failed to be answered.

The only point on which I disagree with Dolores Kelly is that she thinks that amendment No 11 is better than amendment No 10, and I think that amendment No 10 is better than amendment No 11. However, both amendments serve the same purpose and seek to create a commission with standing orders that actually work, because what we have been presented with — initially by the Executive and subsequently by Mr Donaldson's amendment — is simply not workable. Those are the real issues that will have to be addressed when the commission gets down to work, if we do not pass sensible amendments to improve procedures.

As I said, Mr Spratt — the sole DUP Member to contribute, apart from junior Minister Donaldson — at least had the courage to stand on his feet and make his points. However, being described as opposition for opposition's sake for proposing a reasonable set of amendments — with which Mr Spratt's colleagues agree — does not sound to me like opposition for opposition's sake; it sounds like being a sensible, constructive and coherent opposition. It would be a significant improvement if we ever had a constructive and coherent Executive in this place.

Despite what Mr Spratt said, amendment No 8 does not make any improvements to the commission's standing orders. The issue of simple majority in some areas relates only to areas of virtually no consequence — the key issues continue to require unanimity and continue to be as potentially unworkable —

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): That is nonsense.

Mr Ford: As the junior Minister says that that is nonsense, I will give way to him.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank the Member for giving way. Amendment No 8 will enable the commission to make the most of its decisions using a simple majority vote. The Member is entitled to the view that the majority of the work of the commission for victims and survivors is irrelevant. My view is that all the work of the commission is important to those who matter most — the victims.

Mr Ford: Allowing the commissioners to decide by simple majority whether to have tea or coffee is inappropriate. Amendment No 8 seeks not only to make decisions on standing orders to require unanimity — as prescribed in the original Bill — it seeks to make a work programme and issues of financial assistance on which unanimity is required. The amendment seeks to make more issues require unanimity than were in the Bill as it was introduced. Therefore, the Minister is arguing against the very point that he put on paper.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: No. We have heard enough from the Minister. Perhaps I will give way later.

The question should be about why members of the DUP have changed their minds by adding to, rather than lessening, the powers for unanimity.

Mr Molloy — who again is not in his place in his customary way — accused us of playing party politics. He appears to think that the act of tabling amendments is responsible for delaying the establishment of the commission. The delay came when the junior Minister Donaldson twice stated that:

“The Consideration Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill will not be moved today.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p161, col 1; and Bound Volume 29, p364, col 1*].

The delay did not come as a result of Members tabling amendments that seek to make a bad Bill workable; it happened because those who insisted on accelerated passage failed to debate the Consideration Stage of the Bill. Many of us have been in the Chamber on three occasions to discuss the Bill reasonably and sensibly. For DUP or Sinn Féin Back-Benchers to accuse us of being responsible for the delay suggests, according to the biblical parable, something to do with motes and beams.

It is time that some Members accepted that this is a legislative Assembly and that it is our duty to take legislation seriously. It is our duty, as the opposition, to table amendments. We accept the notion that we may win some votes and lose some. That may not be the way it happens in the *ardchomhairle*, but it is the way it happens in democracies.

With the exception of Jennifer McCann, who managed to repeat most of Mr Molloy’s points, the other Members who contributed largely agreed with the thrust of our amendments. Mr Basil McCrea gave his customary support, describing amendment No 8 as shoddy. I am unsure as to how shoddy and grubby compare —

Mr B McCrea: They are pretty close.

Mr Ford: Thank you. The support that was evident today shows how Members view the debate, the lack of debate, and the lack of willingness to engage by OFMDFM.

My colleague Naomi Long, in her usual way, managed to address the deficiencies in the structures of the proposed commission and the attempts that we have made to remedy those deficiencies. She drew attention, as did several other Members, to amendment No 12, and she made the serious point that MLAs cannot pretend to be above the rulings of the courts. There is no reason that we should pretend that we are; and it is simply meaningless to suggest that by removing that pretence we were somehow contributing to instability.

The courts will decide what they wish, and we can do nothing other than accept that. We are not in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, which makes laws that can overturn the decisions of the courts. We have to be careful to act according to those decisions. That is also why amendment No 12 should be supported.

Naomi Long described amendment No 8 as smoke and mirrors. Today’s debate and the lack of substance in the arguments in support of amendment No 8 prove her assertion. That amendment seeks to give the illusion to DUP Back-Benchers that the concerns that were raised through our amendments a few weeks ago, which they supported, were being taken on board. However, that is not the case.

Ms McCann said that we needed a commission with a range of experience. We do not. We need a commissioner, or as it now stands, a commission, that empathises with victims, that understands their concerns and that can deal with the needs of all victims from all backgrounds. We do not need some kind of Balkanised system in which some victims go to one commissioner and some go to another. What Ms McCann said was the opposite of the concept that issues progress inclusively so that problems are dealt with and society can move on. What she outlined will continue to prolong the agony by maintaining the divisions in society through the commission for victims and survivors, and that has to be objected to.

4.15 pm

Mr Cree made the point that amendment No 8 would require a greater degree of unanimity within the commission, and he accepted the points that we made about that. I was slightly worried when Mr Cree said that he did not particularly like amendment No 10 because it would remove the powers of direction from the First Minister and deputy First Minister. He seemed to think that we do not trust the First Minister and deputy First Minister — I cannot imagine how he got that impression.

Mr Cree accepted that there is a serious issue with maintaining the situation whereby the victims’ commission would be distinct from, and not immediately subservient to, the internal machinations of OFMDFM. That is a fundamental point, because that would give the commission the same level of independence as other similar commissions.

Mark Durkan also made that point in a further supporting speech. He said that if the commission is to have real independence, the commissioners cannot be subjected — even on standing orders — to directions from a Department whose ability to produce coherent directions on anything is sadly being tested at the moment.

Mark Durkan also made the key point that having a chief commissioner will not create a hierarchy of victims — something that has often been argued by Sinn Féin. Having a chief commissioner would ensure that the organisation is coherent, as one person could speak for it. That would also allow the entire team of staff to report to one individual, and it would ensure that progress could be made in an inclusive way.

Appointing a chief commissioner would prevent a situation in which individual commissioners could look after different sets of victims, with no progress being made. That has nothing to do with hierarchies — it is about practical working, and ensuring that progress is made. In order to ensure that the commission is coherent, the inclusivity that applies to Government must also apply to the commission.

In his response to the debate, Mr Donaldson said that everything that was previously mentioned in the Bill would require unanimity, and highlighted the issues that could be dealt with by a simple majority. However, the Bill, as presented, only refers to the requirement for unanimity on standing orders. As was said earlier, his amendment enhances the need for unanimity. That is a response to DUP concerns that unanimity would not be required to make any decisions. In fact, that issue has been pushed down the road, further away from what those Members argued for in recent weeks, and towards the position of Sinn Féin. I am not sure where that leaves DUP Members on the basis of what they said publicly. I congratulate Sinn Féin on its ability to persuade the DUP to see its point of view — even though no DUP Member is prepared to explain why they now accept the complete opposite of what they said less than one month ago.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Nonsense.

Mr Ford: The junior Minister can say that that is nonsense, but not one of those who raised their concerns — including those who gave radio interviews — is in this Chamber to explain why they changed their minds. All day, they have drifted in to cast their votes. Aside from those occasions, the junior Minister has been left with a troop of loyal Back-Benchers who — with the exception of Mr Spratt — sit and say nothing. The fact that those Members do not explain why they changed their minds says a great deal about the strength of the arguments that were advanced. It also raises questions about how this procedure works.

Mr Donaldson used the terms “our” and “we” on a number of occasions. At times, it was difficult to tell when he was referring to the DUP, and when he was referring to OFMDFM. He made a very specific point, and responded graciously to an intervention of mine, when he said that it was “our view” that a chief commissioner is not required at present, and that that is the view of OFMDFM.

Amendment No 8 makes provision for a chief commissioner, and yet the junior Minister, when he proposed the amendment, told us that OFMDFM believes that a chief commissioner might not be needed. That raises all kinds of questions about whether there is anything genuine in that amendment. Perhaps that is smoke and mirrors being used by a magician that is not very good, or perhaps it is a compromise between the DUP and Sinn Féin — the DUP gets the power to say that there may be a chief commissioner, and Sinn Féin gets to ensure that one will never be appointed.

Amendment No 8 states that if any member votes against the standing orders, the provision of financial assistance or the work programme, those will fall. Mr Donaldson quite accurately pointed out that members

who are in a minority may choose not to exercise that vote, but they may also choose to do so.

Nothing in amendment No 8 — or new paragraph 9 — will stop crises from arising if one Member refuses to go along with any aspect of those matters. The voting mechanism is crucial. Our amendments make provision for a weighted-majority voting system on all key issues, whereas the OFMDFM proposals have reinforced the requirement for unanimity on all of those. There is nothing in the OFMDFM amendment on how to deal with what happens if there is a problem. A decision on “any other matter” may be decided by a simple majority — that is fair enough, and the junior Minister has made that point. However, once the key issues have been dealt with — the financial assistance, the work programme and the standing orders — the easy bits will have been dealt with. That is assuming that they can be dealt with, because the requirement for unanimity makes it extremely doubtful whether the commission will always manage to deal with those issues.

Proposed sub-paragraph (5) of new paragraph 9 refers to the reporting of the mechanism and how each representation or recommendation was made. That is probably about the only element that is unexceptional. However, proposed sub-paragraph (6) of new paragraph 9 states that the Commission “may” designate a member as chief commissioner, and not that it “shall”. The commission may revoke that designation and it need not give any decisions as to how or why that is done. It seems that that provision is entirely illusory, and it is to give the impression that the DUP has listened to its own Back-Benchers, and that it has noted the amendments that were tabled a month ago. In practice, however, it amounts to absolutely nothing. Nothing of substance has been changed on the issues that DUP Back-Benchers were expressing concerns on a month ago. If anything, it has gone in the other direction. Why is the DUP making that pretence?

I am surprised that, having said what it did, the DUP has now reached the point where it is back to reinforcing points that we were told it did not like. The continuing absence of so many DUP Members suggests that at least some of them are embarrassed, but no doubt we will see them arriving to cast their votes.

Amendment No 8 does nothing whatsoever to address the concerns that have been expressed by the DUP. There “may” be a chief commissioner, and not “shall”, only if the First Minister and the deputy First Minister both agree — and Mr Donaldson said that we do not need one anyway. That is not a step forward.

At this point, it seems clear that Sinn Féin deserves to be congratulated for wiping the eye of the DUP Ministers and, by proxy, the DUP Back-Benchers. Sinn Féin may have persuaded the DUP, but it has not persuaded Members at this end of the Chamber. There

is no reason why amendment Nos 2, 7, 9, 10 and 12 should not be made, or, if some of my colleagues to my right prefer it, amendment No 11 in place of amendment No 10. Amendment No 8 should be rejected entirely by anybody in the House who wishes to see a commission that will work.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 36; Noes 54.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Burnside, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Neeson, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs M Bradley and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. It will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 4, 5 and 6 with amendment No 3. These amendments prevent the appointment, as members of the commission or employees of the commission, of any person who has been convicted of a criminal offence. I remind Members that amendment Nos 5 and 6 are mutually exclusive.

I call Mr Danny Kennedy to move amendment No 3 and to explain the other amendments in the group.

Mr Kennedy: I beg to move amendment No 3: In page 2, line 29, at end insert

“() The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly shall not appoint as a member anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 4: In page 3, line 17, at end insert

“(6A) The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly shall remove from office as a member anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident.

(6B) For the purposes of this paragraph the definition of ‘conflict-related incident’ shall have effect as if for the word ‘Commission’ there were substituted ‘First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly’.” — [Mr Kennedy.]

No 5: In page 3, line 35, at end insert

“(2) If it appears to the Commission that a person it proposes to appoint as an employee has at any time been convicted of a criminal offence, the Commission may only make the appointment if it has obtained the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the appointment.” — [The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson).]

No 6: In page 3, line 35, at end insert

“(2) The Commission shall not appoint as an employee anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident.” — [Mr Kennedy.]

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this third group of important amendments.

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Members are conducting private conversations in the Chamber. Order.

Mr Kennedy: It is hard to compete with that, Mr Speaker, but I shall do my best.

There is a saying:

“The past is a foreign country”.

I doubt whether any of us believes that Northern Ireland's recent past is a “foreign country”. Our collective memory as a society has been scarred by more than three decades of violence and bloodshed. To a greater or lesser extent, that memory has shaped all who lived through those years.

It is tragic and sad that a total of 3,634 people were murdered in the decades leading to 1998. It is also sad that other lives have been lost since 1998. All the bereaved families have endured the ongoing pain of losing a loved one, in many cases to a brutal and violent death.

In creating a commission for victims and survivors, we must approach with respect the pains, memories and ongoing grief of victims. We must seek to establish for our entire society a framework for approaching our past in a manner that promotes healing and reconciliation.

It is on that basis, therefore, that the Ulster Unionist Party offers its three amendments. Amendment No 3 would prohibit OFMDFM from appointing as a commissioner:

“anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident.”

The terminology is drawn from the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. It is already the established terminology employed in existing legislation, which recognises that criminal offences arising out of a conflict-related incident have a particular significance and meaning in our society.

Random individual crimes scar lives and undermine our social fabric. Criminal offences arising out of a conflict-related incident carry an additional significance. They point to acts, events and organisations that conducted ongoing campaigns of violence and inflicted great suffering and human rights abuses on our society.

Amendment No 3 recognises that, and it acknowledges that people with criminal convictions for such actions cannot reasonably be considered appropriate persons to work with victims, address victims' concerns or build positive relationships with victims.

Can we seriously or reasonably expect victims of violence or human rights abuses to accept as a commissioner a person convicted by the courts of violence and human rights abuses? Can we seriously or reasonably expect a victim of terror to accept as a commissioner a person convicted by the courts of acts of terror?

It should be noted that amendment No 3 does not discriminate between those who have been convicted of criminal offences arising out of a conflict-related incident. Amendment No 3 prohibits republicans, loyalists or anyone else convicted of taking the law into his or her own hands from being appointed a victims' commissioner.

A principled pragmatism is at work here. People convicted of conflict-related crimes must be prohibited from being appointed a commissioner if we want the commission to succeed in building confidence among victims, establish its own integrity and be acknowledged by wider society as meaningfully addressing the legacy of our conflict.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member clarify for the House why he refers only to people who have been convicted of crimes that are related to the Troubles, and not to paedophiles and every other type of criminal, as my party has?

Mr Kennedy: Surely, the Member understands that the legislation that is being created for a victims' commissioner is aimed principally at those who have suffered as a result of the Troubles — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Speaker, it is a pity that junior Minister Donaldson continues to interrupt from a seated position. He will have the opportunity to deal with the issue in his own comments.

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I will in a moment.

Everyone knows that the legislation's intention is aimed principally at victims of the so-called conflict in Northern Ireland.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I must give way to Mrs Long first.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to the comments that were made from a sedentary position. Will he agree that it is rather silly for anyone to draw a parallel between the statement that he was making and the notion that he means that paedophiles are OK?

Mr Kennedy: Absolutely. I accept that entirely. I am glad that Mrs Long understands the argument that is being made. It is a pity that neither the junior Minister nor, indeed, Mr Spratt understood the point that I was making.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank the Member for giving way. Surely the point is that it is inappropriate for someone who has a serious criminal offence to be a victims' commissioner, whether that person's crime is conflict-related or otherwise. My honourable friend made the point that the Member's amendment does not extend to cover other criminals and crimes. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to ask why not.

Mr Kennedy: I accept part of the logic that the junior Minister has put forward. However, I must say that he and others have failed to deal properly with the legislation's definition of a victim. I urge him and others to re-examine its inability in that regard.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am sorry, I must continue. The junior Minister will have an opportunity to address the House on the matter. Members will look forward to hearing the view that he shares with his colleague the Member for North Belfast junior Minister Kelly.

Some opponents of amendment No 3 may suggest that it is drafted too precisely; that there are people in society who are guilty of acts of violence and terror, but have never faced the courts. That is true. However, with regard to drafting legislation, what objective criteria could be applied other than criminal convictions? There are, of course, people who would simply ignore the courts. However, for those who, throughout the conflict, adhered to the rule of law, what objective criteria could be applied other than convictions that are handed down by the courts?

As for people who say that amendment No 3 ignores the progress that has been made during the past 10 years, I suggest that they misinterpret, perhaps deliberately, the

amendment's intention. People who have had a certain past can have a different future. Some of those who sit in the Executive testify to that. The legislation is not concerned with electoral mandates or about creating a power-sharing Executive that will allow Northern Ireland to move from conflict to peace. It is about dealing with victims' needs, winning victims' confidence, and creating a commission that is recognised as having integrity by victims. For that to happen, the Assembly cannot pass legislation that will humiliate victims by requiring them to approach a commission amongst whose number, as a commissioner, is a person who has been found guilty by the courts of acts of terror, violence and human rights abuses.

4.45 pm

It is for the same reasons that we have brought amendment No 6 — proposing:

“The Commission shall not appoint as an employee anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident”

— before the House. The same considerations apply to the post of commissioner. The commissioners will be the public face of the commission, and, therefore, it is incumbent on us to ensure that they have the confidence of victims. However, it is the commission's staff who will interact with victims on a daily basis. Therefore, to ensure the confidence of victims, the recognition of the commission's integrity and the confidence of wider society that the commission can meaningfully address the legacy of our conflict, it is vital that its staff have not been judged by the courts to be guilty of the very acts that created the victims in the first place.

In that regard, as I said earlier, we would be humiliating victims if we required them to approach commission staff found guilty by the courts of acts of terror, violence and human rights abuses. A victims' commission that included in its staff perpetrators who had created victims could not reasonably be expected to have the confidence of victims. Amendment Nos 3 and 6 are required for the commission to function effectively and to authentically serve and address the needs of victims.

Amendment No 4 introduces two new sub-paragraphs, 6A and 6B. Sub-paragraph 6B merely removes any uncertainty and ambiguity from the grounds on which the First Minister and deputy First Minister can remove a commissioner from office. The amendment does not seek to undermine the necessary flexibility granted by the Bill with regard to the First Minister and deputy First Minister's acting in light of a commissioner's receiving a criminal conviction while in office. The Bill states that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister may remove from office a person who has been “convicted of a criminal offence”. I recognise that such flexibility is required and is normal procedure in similar legislation.

However, I return to the point about the status of criminal convictions arising out of a conflict-related incident. Under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, article 2(2) states:

“‘conflict-related incident’ means ... a violent incident occurring in or after 1966 in connection with the affairs of Northern Ireland”.

Therefore, proposed sub-paragraph 6A addresses two, perhaps unlikely, prospects: that of a commissioner being appointed who has a criminal conviction arising out of a conflict-related incident, which only becomes public knowledge after appointment, and that of a commissioner who, subsequent to appointment, receives such a conviction. In legislating on a matter of such great sensitivity, there is a strong case for considering such eventualities — and for promoting the confidence of victims' groups in the new commission.

Finally, proposed sub-paragraph 6B is a technicality to provide OFMDFM with the power to define “conflict-related incident” when considering the appointment of a commissioner. Once again, the wording of the 2006 Order should be recalled:

“‘conflict-related incident’ means an incident appearing ... to be a violent incident occurring in or after 1966 in connection with the affairs of Northern Ireland”.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he clarify whether that would apply to any jurisdiction, whether the North of Ireland or the Republic of Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: The jurisdiction of Great Britain and Northern Ireland would be the prime consideration; whether that could be extended to other jurisdictions remains to be seen.

Although some people in OFMDFM may have particular interpretations — *[Interruption.]*

Does the junior Minister want me to give way? He is being particularly disruptive. If he wants to be the naughty boy, I will be happy to give way and to hear from him at any stage. After all, he is a former Ulster Unionist.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I simply pose a question as a follow up to Mrs Kelly's fair question. Are we to presume that the people who bombed Dublin and Monaghan would be eligible to be commissioners because their offence was not committed in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: Clearly not; but we are subject to international law — *[Interruption.]* I see that Mr Donaldson is not the only child in the Assembly today.

The Ulster Unionist Party would be open to ensuring that anyone with a criminal conviction should not be eligible for appointment as a commissioner.

Although some people in OFMDFM have a particular interpretation of the decades since 1969, that aspect of the 2006 Act and the power that would be granted by

this amendment are based on objective criteria. Criminal convictions for acts of terror, violence or human rights abuses associated with the conflict cannot easily be explained away — they are objective facts. Therefore, I commend amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6 to the House.

Those amendments seek to secure the confidence of victims in the commissioners and in the commission, and to secure wider public confidence in the integrity of the commission. The amendment that was put forward in Mr Donaldson's name on behalf of OFMDFM appears to treat all criminal convictions equally, when it is obvious that conflict-related offences have a particular significance for the workings of the victims' commission.

It would be helpful —

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I will give way in a second.

It would be helpful if the junior Minister would give the House an explicit guarantee that his amendment will prevent someone with a conflict-related conviction being appointed as a victims' commissioner.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I am glad that the Ulster Unionist Party is consistent in seeking to create a distinction between crimes because I recollect that, in 1998, that party signed up to an agreement that resulted in the early release from prison of those criminals whom he is now seeking to exclude from office on the basis that their crimes were conflict-related.

According to Mr Kennedy, it does not matter whether an ordinary criminal is a commissioner; what really matters to him is that the people whom he and his party released early from prison do not have the opportunity to become commissioners. I am astounded.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for being astounded, but I remind him that, given that his party is sharing power, he is not in a strong position to lecture on the issue.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): You are also sharing power.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: The DUP is intent on imposing power to the exclusion of others in the House, and there is evidence for that today. Furthermore, the junior Minister's party has placed Sinn Féin representatives not only at the heart of Government, but at the heart of policing. He despised the Ulster Unionist Party for sharing power, but, when we first did that, the largest party opposite was not Sinn Féin; our principal partner in Government was the SDLP. The DUP allowed Sinn Féin to take the ascendancy and is now clearly in partnership Government with Sinn Féin. The DUP continues to vote with Sinn Féin, as we have seen today.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am sorry, I am almost finished.

Given the voting patterns that have emerged today, it is unlikely that the Ulster Unionist Party's amendments will be accepted. I regret that because they have been offered as a sensible contribution to an important debate.

Those are the actions of the two largest parties that are in Government together, and they are not exercising any significant degree of collective responsibility. That is the continuation of a coalition that was forged through political necessity and I have no doubt that, when the votes are cast later, further evidence of that will be demonstrated. Nevertheless, I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr Moutray: I welcome the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. In common with other Members, I wish to place on record my and my colleagues' wholehearted support for ensuring that society's innocent victims have a voice through the newly appointed commission. The debate is important and, ultimately, it will enable Members — as a body of elected representatives — to get the Bill right and to champion the needs of those in society who have suffered alone for too long.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Moutray: No. As I said on a previous occasion, I hear quite a lot from Mrs Kelly in another place.

I welcome the fact that we have before us several rational, logical and sensible amendments that have been tabled by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. My honourable friends have spoken about those in respect of the first two groups of amendments. As for the third group of amendments, I support amendment No 5 and oppose amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6.

In comparison to the amendments tabled by Mr Kennedy, the scope of amendment No 5, which was tabled by OFMDFM, is broader and more inclusive, and it would disallow a person whom the commission proposed to appoint as an employee who has, at any time, been convicted of a criminal offence. Furthermore, the insertion in schedule 1, page 3, line 35 includes the provision that the commission may make an appointment only if it has obtained the approval of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister.

The problem with amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6 is the phrase "conflict-related incident", as mentioned by Mr Kennedy. Such a phrase includes only individuals who have a criminal conviction related to the 30 years of the Troubles. That simply does not include individuals who have a criminal conviction that is not related to the Troubles. Ultimately, such a statement would create

a limiter and exclude people in society who have committed a serious offence.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Moutray: No. I have listened to the Member all day, and it is my turn to speak.

A paedophile, a non-sectarian murderer, a convicted thief, a rapist or a fraudster might apply for and obtain a position. I for one would not appreciate such people dealing with the affairs and needs of society's victims. If Members support amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6, such a scenario could be possible, thus increasing the chance of innocent victims being demeaned and the commission's being susceptible to failure.

Amendment No 5 would ensure that both the commissioners and their employees, with whom innocent victims will deal, have been approved by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and Members and victims could take heart from that. The commission would be able to make an appointment only with the approval of OFMDFM. Amendment No 5 would instil Members with the confidence that victims' needs would be put to the fore. Ultimately, such an addition to the Bill would provide a safeguard and protection for those in society who have suffered for too long at the hands of the direct rule Administration. In addition, it would reduce those people's vulnerability and ensure the appointment of high-calibre commissioners and employees.

Members know the importance of matters relating to victims and survivors and that a commission for victims and survivors must be established on firm foundations as quickly as possible in order that work in that area can progress. I acknowledge that fine-tuning took some time; however, the DUP was adamant about getting it right and addressing the prevailing and potential problems facing the proposed commission. I assure the House that, unlike many others who have attempted to undermine the process, the DUP is committed to innocent victims' needs and to those people who have suffered great personal loss and been forgotten for too long.

Following a priority bid from OFMDFM, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Peter Robinson, secured and allocated approximately £36 million for this sector.

Therefore, the resources are in place for the proposals to work. Ultimately, progress has been made and the wheels are in motion to champion the needs of innocent victims. Amendment No 5 protects that band of people in society. Although the definition of a victim should include the perpetrators, the Bill does not allow for that. The DUP will not fail the electorate on its pledge to the innocent victims and survivors of the Province.

5.00 pm

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support amendment No 5 and oppose amendment

Nos 3, 4 and 6. Like amendment No 8 this morning, amendment No 5 takes into account the issues raised by the other amendments. The purpose of an amendment is to make some changes to the Bill that satisfy the concerns of Members, which amendment No 5 does. It is up to the Assembly to give the commission the power to get on with its work, which amendment No 5 provides for.

Ulster Unionist Party Members oppose that because they have not decided if they are part of the Government — some days they are in it, some days they are not. They want a Minister, but they do not want to adhere to collective responsibility. The SDLP also has a Minister in the Executive: collective decision-making seems to affect its Members on all other issues, and they lecture the rest of us about collective decision-making.

Mr B McCrea: I am not sure where the Member is coming from. Surely, he welcomes interventions from other parties, even if they just put forward a reasonable point of view — not everybody gets everything right the first time. It is good for democracy — and I trust that the Member is a democrat — that other Members table amendments, try to win people over, listen to other viewpoints and try to build a consensus. What is the problem with that? Why should we not table amendments?

Mr Molloy: I began by saying that amendment No 5 takes previous amendments into account and has tried to accommodate them. All the Member's contributions in the debate have been interventions, incidentally. Other Members' opinions have influenced the decision-makers, who have tabled an amendment that is a compromise. I thought that the Member would be happy that amendment No 5 takes his concerns into account and that he would support it. Instead, there will, most likely, be more divisions. Therefore, it is difficult to find a way forward that will allow the commission to do its job.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member acknowledge that the junior Minister Mr Donaldson stated that the amendments were not put to the Executive and that there was no discussion with either the SDLP Minister or, presumably, the two Ulster Unionist Party Ministers?

Mr Molloy: The Member will also recall that the junior Minister Mr Donaldson said that the original proposal for the commission was agreed by the Executive. Therefore, every amendment does not have to go back to the Executive — surely, we want decision-making, not amendments going back and forth continuously. We want the commission to have the power to get on with its work. It is important that Members focus on the needs of victims and survivors and avoid the party-political point scoring that has, unfortunately, happened in the Chamber today.

We must give the commission the power to deal with the situation and have the flexibility to accommodate victims and families on proposals that they may have rather than dictating what they should be doing. The commission must be allowed to get on with its work, and Members should give it the necessary support.

Mrs D Kelly: The subtle difference in the language used by Mr Moutray and Mr Molloy is interesting. Mr Moutray referred to the “innocent victims”, for whom there is no definition, and Mr Molloy referred to the “victims”.

It has been agreed that this is a sensitive piece of legislation, which must deal with a very brutal past — one in which more than 3,000 people lost their lives, and many more thousands were injured. It is because of the sensitive nature of this legislation that the SDLP recognises amendment Nos 3 and 4, which were put tabled by Mr Kennedy, and which concern public appointments. The SDLP will be supporting amendment Nos 3 and 4. There is a very clear demarcation between the public appointment of commissioners to the victims’ commission and any other public appointments. This matter warrants special consideration. It would be an obscenity if commissioners had been the perpetrators of some of the most brutal crimes of the past.

The SDLP will not be supporting amendment Nos 5 or 6 because there has to be a clear differentiation between the employees of the commission and the commissioners. Mr Donaldson has said that OFMDFM will potentially step in if the tea lady for the commission did not pay her TV licence fine, but they would not touch at all on the more difficult appointment of a commissioner.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): In paragraph 3(6)(a) of schedule 1 to the Bill, provision has already been made for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to remove a commissioner if that person is convicted of a criminal offence. There is an even-handed approach. The powers of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister apply to commissioners and employees.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his intervention, but that does not deal with past convictions, and in particular, conflict-related convictions. Mr Molloy has made great play —

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I am grateful to the Member for giving way, as it allows me to provide clarification on the amendments. The commissioners will be appointed by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. If the First Minister and the deputy First Minister wish to appoint a commissioner who had

committed a criminal offence, that decision would be made at the appointment stage, so situations would not be dealt with only after commissioners are in post. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister also have the power to block the appointment of anyone who has a criminal conviction in the first place.

Mrs D Kelly: The junior Minister might note that we are not afraid to take interventions from the other side of the House, unlike some of his colleagues.

If that is an assurance that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will not appoint someone who has a conflict-related criminal record, I welcome that. The legislation, as currently drafted, does not prevent that and does not offer an overall guarantee. Mr Molloy made comments about political footballs, political interference and political comments — although they were made in a political Chamber. One would wonder what Members would be here for if we did not make political comments.

On 22 April 2008, Sinn Féin played to the media and said that it had consulted and been in touch with other parties. In fact, a written answer that I received on 2 May stated that junior Minister Kelly contacted party leaders only on the morning of 22 April. There was no consultation on the amendments prior to 22 April, and no way for people to have dialogue with the other parties, or with OFMDFM — we were denied that opportunity at Committee because of the so-called accelerated passage of this legislation.

I do not wish to prolong what is going to be a very long day. Our party will be supporting amendment Nos 3 and 4, but opposing amendment Nos 5 and 6.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party will, regretfully, oppose all of the amendments in this group, even though some of them come from the unofficial opposition, and some from the Government.

The Alliance Party’s reservations concern whether these amendments are needed in the first place and the way in which they appear to cut across existing legislation — I am talking about legislation that deals with limitation of offences and the rehabilitation of offenders — natural justice and the rules governing public appointments in general.

Amendment No 3 states that the First Minister and deputy First Minister:

“shall not appoint as a member anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of a conflict-related incident.”

There is no mention or obvious indication of how serious a criminal offence is being referred to. I imagine that the amendment refers to a crime that is fairly serious and violent, but a criminal offence could be pushing over a policeman at Drumcree 20 years ago.

Mr Spratt: That is still an offence.

Mr Lunn: Is that really a reason for an offence to be held against somebody for all time? Is the amendment necessary? There is already legislation in place to cover those matters.

Mr Molloy: Is the Member saying that the provision about criminal offences should be removed? Does he believe that being convicted of pushing over a policeman should not be any barrier to a person being appointed to the commission?

Mr Lunn: Normal legislation would take care of such situations. Furthermore, the First Minister and deputy First Minister would first have to agree about the matter. To date, they have not agreed on too much as far as this issue is concerned. Built-in safeguards are already in place.

Mr Kennedy mentioned that a definition of a conflict-related incident exists in some other piece of legislation. However, none of the amendments makes reference to that legislation. Thus, we are left with the wide general term, “conflict-related incident”.

Moreover, no time limit is mentioned. People talk about the 30 years of the Troubles, but it is actually 40 years now. Are we really going to hold such offences against people all that time? I am thinking of employees rather than commission members. The rules governing employment are more stringent and clear-cut. Therefore, as has already been mentioned, somebody who has committed a serious criminal offence that is non-conflict-related would, in certain circumstances, not have to declare their conviction. They could have a very serious conviction that falls outside the 10- or 12-year period or whatever. However, under this proposal, if individuals have committed an offence that is conflict-related but utterly trivial, they have to declare it — at least, I think that is the case; again, it is not very clear. They would not have to declare it under the terms of the existing legislation.

I presume that proposed paragraph 6A in amendment No 4 refers to a post-appointment situation. That is not stated, and, again, confusion reigns. It states:

“shall remove from office as a member anyone convicted of a criminal offence arising out of conflict-related incident.”

There would already have been an opportunity at the outset not to appoint an individual who is guilty of such an offence. Does the amendment refer to an offence that happened after the appointment was made or a previous offence that came to light after the appointment was made?

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Absolutely, seeing as it is Mr McCrea.

Mr B McCrea: It is quite clear that the amendment refers to a post-appointment situation, whereby a commissioner is convicted of an offence. Obviously, one cannot hold something against somebody until

they are convicted. The meaning is as one would guess, and that is the only way in which we could table the amendment.

Mr Lunn: I thank Mr McCrea for his intervention. The problem is that we should not have to guess in those matters. Even if the amendment refers to a post-appointment situation, it is still not clear. I read proposed paragraph 6B a few times today. The party gave its best brains the task of figuring out what it means. I even asked Mr Kennedy what it meant this morning. I am none the wiser. *[Laughter.]*

It is a pity that Mr Kennedy is not in the Chamber now, because I would love him to intervene and tell me what it means. The amendment just does not appear to bear any relationship to the Bill that it is trying to amend.

On the grounds of total confusion, the Alliance party will not be supporting amendment No 4; and I have a feeling that we would not support it even if we did understand it. *[Laughter.]*

5.15 pm

Amendment No 5 — the Government amendment — does not mention “conflict-related incident”; rather, it inserts “criminal offence”. Frankly, that is overkill. There is a level of appointment and a level of responsibility in these matters. There is also existing legislation, and we do not need to include that amendment at all. We should trust the commission to make its own appointments, and to make them wisely.

Amendment No 6 is the same. It refers to the commission’s appointment of an employee; however, its wording again states “conflict-related incident” instead of a general conviction. Legislation exists to cover those matters. Sensitivities surround this particular organisation, but sensitivities also surround the appointment of employees to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and various other organisations. Prospective employees could pose a security risk, or what might be loosely described as “sensitivities” could be a factor. We do not need separate, draconic rules introduced for this particular body. For all those reasons, the Alliance Party must oppose all the amendments in the third group.

Mr B McCrea: I chose not to intervene too much during Mr Lunn’s contribution, because I hope to answer much of what he was questioning. At the core of the debate is whether there is a need to define something as conflict-related or simply criminal. I agree with what I believe was Mr Lunn’s main point concerning the statute of limitations. Legislation exists that covers all areas of criminal activity. Some Members mentioned paedophiles, as if that equated with this issue. A problem with the criminal-justice system is that no mechanism exists to deal with people who have committed a crime, served their entire sentence, yet still present a risk to society, because people cannot be

tried for something that they may or may not do. That issue was raised and explained to us at length on the Policing Board, of which I am a member, and I believe that it was to that issue that Mr Lunn was referring.

What is to be done about people who have served their time? There are specific reasons why particular requirements are necessary for the victims' commission. It is unreasonable to expect victims of crime to have to humiliate themselves by applying to a commission, some of whose members may have been involved in making them victims. To avoid putting them in that extremely serious position, it is worth introducing clarifying amendments. Therefore, it is on the specific issue of conflict-related incidents that we wish to amend the Bill, although I accept Mr Lunn's point about general convictions.

The debate appears to be 'Alice in Wonderland' stuff. We are talking about asking victims of crime to come forward to people who made them victims. I do not know how people can sleep in their beds at night over this issue. It is another political fudge. It is a back-room deal taking place in this ivory tower in which we try to convince people that black is white; that wrong is right; that good is bad. That is not correct: people outside who listen to, or read the text of, this debate, and who look at people in the Chamber as potential leaders, do not want us to fudge such issues. They want us to debate them honestly.

They want us to resolve the situation. Several comments, frankly, smack of hypocrisy and cant. My friend Mrs Kelly thought, quite appropriately, that we were having two debates. Mr Moutray talked about "innocent victims" but offered no definition of the term, while Mr Molloy mentioned "victims" — there seems to be some dichotomy.

We must resolve the situation to assist "innocent victims". Although definitions of the phrase may vary, to me they are passive, innocent bystanders who were affected through no fault of their own. We must help those people. Not only are they being lumped together with all sorts of other victims, they must make representations to those who caused them to be victims. It is outrageous. Mr Molloy said that he is disappointed that some of us would put forward amendments —

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Is it in order for a Member to infer that victims must make representations to potential perpetrators when there is no evidence that any of the four commissioners have been convicted of criminal offences? Do those comments not impugn the commissioners' integrity? I accept that there is privilege in the House, but the matter must be clarified. If the Member has evidence of any of the four commissioners having criminal convictions, he should say so. Otherwise, I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will ask him to withdraw his remark.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has made his point clearly.

Mr B McCrea: That intervention demonstrates, once again, that some people will argue that black is white. They are concerned about how the legislation will be applied in the future. However, that is not for the Assembly to judge, it is for the courts to do so. If a commissioner were someone convicted of a criminal offence related to the Troubles; that would put innocent victims in a difficult situation.

I hear the junior Minister, once again, speaking from a sedentary position. If he wants to intervene, he should ask; he does not need to mutter from the sidelines.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Members are allowed to have quiet conversations with colleagues. If the Member believes that power is needed to remove people who are convicted of a criminal offence from the commission, why is he restricting that power to criminal offences that are related to the conflict? Why does he not support our amendment, which would incorporate all criminal offences?

Mr B McCrea: It is worth having the debate. Is it right to appoint people with criminal convictions to the district policing partnerships or to the Policing Board? As Mr Lunn explained, there are sensitivities around many of the issues. This is a wholly exceptional case in which we are dealing with innocent victims of 30 to 40 years of terrorist atrocities. It is, therefore, not appropriate to appoint individuals with convictions relating to the Troubles as victims' commissioners, and an amendment must spell that out clearly.

However, if we are to dismiss commissioners who have been convicted of any criminal offence, the situation could get extremely absurd. Paedophilia is a criminal offence — but so is on-street parking. Would on-street parking be considered an offence that would merit a commissioner's dismissal? Such an offence would be not relevant.

Some Members have tried to prevent a reasoned debate on sensitive issues taking place. Some have resorted to personal attacks and others quoted statements that were not made, simply to deflect attention from their failure to deal properly with this sensitive issue.

It is my party's belief that conflict-related criminal activity creates serious issues. The Bill should have the power to deal with those properly. Some people have made allegations about "ceasefire unionists". Let me remind those people that the bulk of the Troubles occurred before 1972, and at that age — *[Interruption.]*

Do I hear a "what?"

The authors of 'Lost Lives' state that:

"The statistics reveal the intensity of the conflict in the early 1970s, with just over half of all troubles victims dying prior to 1977. More people were killed in 1972" — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr B McCrea:

“More people were killed in 1972, the worst year of the troubles, than in the years 1991-99.”

Anyone who was born in 1962 would have been 10 years of age at that time. I went to school at Belfast Royal Academy, which was in the heart of the murder triangle. Gunshots were fired through the school, and we were aware of all the incidents that were happening at that time. Those of us who kept going gave as much support to this country as anyone else. It is not just offensive, but strange, that people should try to show up those who made their contribution through commerce.

This situation is heading for a train wreck. We can have as many debates as we please. If the victims’ commission does not address fully the needs of the victims, and if it is seen to fail, people will ask what the Assembly is for other than political fudge and backroom deals. That is unacceptable, because it does not lead to the future for Northern Ireland.

Mrs Long: I have listened very carefully to the debate on this group of amendments and the motivations for and against them, even though they were not tabled by my party. I find myself in the unusual situation of defending the original legislation on this particular point. I am not convinced that any of these amendments add anything to this particular aspect of the Bill.

Our amendments have always been aimed at making the commission more workable and allowing a strong and coherent voice to be heard. I am not convinced that these amendments will achieve that. However, I will examine them in two separate sections. First, amendments No 3 and No 4 deal specifically with the commissioners designate. I accept Danny Kennedy’s argument about the difficulties and sensitivities that surround those appointments. The appointment of a convicted bomber or gunman to such a post would clearly cause serious concern among those people who would have to seek their advice, particularly if they were a victim or a survivor of an incident in which the appointee was involved. That is a sensitive issue.

I also listened carefully to Dolores Kelly, who explained how the differences between the commissioners designate should be approached. She also spoke about staffing the commission. However, paragraph 3, sub-paragraph 6(a) of schedule 1 to the original Bill permits criminal offences of all kinds to be taken into account in the appointment of the commissioners designate. That would include, by definition, conflict-related offences. Therefore, from that perspective, we are no further forward if we are simply saying that the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, have to examine a subset of convictions when making an appointment, as opposed to taking all kinds of convictions into

account. Essentially, the same people will be making the decision at the end of such a deliberation.

We must be honest and admit that the appointments processes for the very persons who appoint the commissioner designate, direct the workings of the commission, develop the victims’ strategy and award a budget are not so constrained by such important sensitivities that a conviction for a conflict-related offence would bar them from office. There are difficulties surrounding those who structure and direct the commission being given a degree of freedom that the commission itself would not be afforded.

Paragraph 3(6)(a) of schedule 1 specifically deals with the issue of the commissioners and criminal offences in a more comprehensive way than the alternatives that have been proposed.

5.30 pm

I accept that there are specific differences. I hope that no one in the Chamber would equate a person who fails to pay a fine and ends up with a criminal conviction with a person who took a life during the Troubles. However, we must be realistic and accept that those who took lives during the Troubles are a subset of those who have criminal offences, and they will be dealt with under paragraph 3(6)(a) of the original Bill. Although I agree with the purpose and thrust of amendment Nos 3 and 4, they do not add to the delivery of that aim and objective, and, therefore, we cannot support them.

Amendment Nos 5 and 6 deal with staff members. That issue is already dealt with in employment legislation. Trevor Lunn pointed out, rightly, that The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 deals with the expiry of criminal convictions and spent convictions and the way in which they should be handled. We will be entering very murky waters if we say that the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill will provide for different norms to those provided for by that Order.

That brings me to the crux of the debate, which is the definition of “conflict-related incident”. Danny Kennedy may correct me if I did not pick up on each element of his argument, but he provided a wide definition that included any violent incident since 1966 that was related to the Troubles. That was a type of working definition. Although I do not wish to minimize the importance of lawful behaviour, it is possible that a person who was involved in a relatively minor or peripheral way as a teenager, for example, could be barred from playing a full role as a member of staff.

When examining such matters, we must be careful about proportionality. We should not bar people who have put their pasts behind them and are willing to move forward, especially if their roles in conflict-related incidents — although they broke the law — might not have been extreme breaches of the types that other

Members have described. Trevor Lunn used the examples of a person who had pushed another over, or of someone who, as a teenager, had thrown a brick at a bus. No one is saying that such activities do not breach the law or that they are not wrong — clearly they are wrong. Nevertheless, should they bar a person who is now in his or her 30s or 40s from undertaking an administrative role in the commission? Frankly, I am not sure that that should be the case.

Mr Lunn: Does the Member agree that it is not only a question of proportionality, but also whether the so-called offender would have to declare such a conviction at all? If the legislation on the rehabilitation of offenders states that a person does not have to declare such a conviction, it will not be on his or her record, as far as I know. Therefore, why should that person have to declare such a conviction for a particular job in a particular Department? Does the Member agree that that does not make sense?

Mrs Long: I agree entirely that that does not make sense. Part of the difficulty is that the legislation was drafted with a certain category of criminal offence in mind. That is part of the problem with having such a wide definition of a conflict-related incident.

It has also been suggested that power would be given to OFMDFM to define a conflict-related incident and what effect it might have. To be honest, I do not believe that OFMDFM, as it stands at present, is capable of agreeing a conclusion. There are clear differences of opinion, both in the Chamber and outside on the street, as to what constitutes a conflict-related incident or criminal activity in respect of the Troubles. All of those matters could become a barrier to our being able to deliver for victims, if we allowed them to. My party proposed amendments in an attempt to make the commission function better for the benefit of victims, but I am not sure that opening that Pandora's box will do so, and that is why we have concerns about it.

I suspect that the definition of a conflict-related incident will be similar to the definition of a victim, which remains contested. If we wait until we have agreement on that, we will not actually deliver for those victims and survivors who are ageing and are seeking help and assistance.

From that perspective, I have doubts about those amendments. Amendment No 5 is at least clear in its mention of employees who have:

“at any time been convicted of a criminal offence”.

In that sense, the test is similar to that for the appointment of the commission. In those circumstances, as my colleague Trevor Lunn said, spent convictions and so on have to be the primary driver in any decisions about employment of staff. That was the case before these amendments and, frankly, that will be the case after these amendments. These amendments do not add

anything substantive to the Bill, and I would prefer that they not be made.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate on this batch of amendments. Mr Kennedy opened the debate with the reasons why he felt that the Ulster Unionist amendments should be accepted. We have difficulty in accepting those amendments because of the narrow range of crimes that they cover. I accept his point that, given the specific role of the victims' commission, criminal offences committed in the context of the conflict — if we may call it that — are, perhaps, of greater relevance than other crimes.

Nevertheless, I am sure that Mr Kennedy would agree that people have been victims of other crimes, not just conflict-related crimes. Those people would find it equally difficult to deal with persons who have been convicted of such crimes. It would be absurd to disqualify an individual who had committed a paramilitary murder from membership of — or employment in — the commission but not disqualify a serial killer, simply because their murders were not carried out on behalf of a paramilitary organisation. The public simply would not understand that distinction.

Mr Kennedy: The intention is that all such people would be excluded, and that relevant legislation would be amended or enacted to ensure that.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I welcome Mr Kennedy's intervention but I urge him, therefore, to withdraw his amendments and support amendment No 5. Amendment No 5 treats all crimes the same, and grants the First Minister and the deputy First Minister the discretion to remove from office anyone who is convicted of a crime. Indeed, they already have the power to prevent such an individual from being appointed.

I hope that the Ulster Unionists will reflect on the confusion that has arisen following today's debate. Mr Lunn confessed to being confused by the inconsistencies in the Ulster Unionist Members' arguments in support of their amendments. Amendment No 5 provides clarity and adequately addresses the concerns that they have rightly raised. I do not object to the basis or the motivation for the Ulster Unionist amendments. However, they are simply not wide enough, and do not adequately cover all the scenarios that the Ulster Unionists want to cover; our amendment does. I hope that the Ulster Unionist Party will support our amendment and consider withdrawing its own amendments, even at this late stage.

I hope that I dealt with the issues referred to by Mrs Kelly in my interventions in the discussion on whether the First Minister and deputy First Minister would have a certain role to play in the process of appointments.

Mrs D Kelly: If paragraph 6A was so strong in the original legislation, what is the necessity for amendment No 5?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The reason is that paragraph 6 relates to appointments to the commission and does not cover the staff. Amendment No 5 is required to cover employees of the commission as well as the commissioners themselves. That is why we did not need to amend the Bill's provisions relating to appointments to the commission.

Mr Lunn raised valid issues about legislation relating to rehabilitation of offenders, which confers certain rights on offenders. We are mindful of that, and we have consulted our legal advisers. We are assured that our amendment complies with current employment law, and I am satisfied with that.

Mr Basil McCrea, like Mr Kennedy, sought to distinguish between crimes that were committed during the conflict and other crimes. I understand the point: the victims' commission will deal specifically with victims of the Troubles, and I accept that it is a particularly sensitive issue. However, I have mentioned several types of convicted criminals who could qualify for membership of the commission or for employment by the commission, if we did not have a wider definition. We believe that amendment No 5 more adequately covers the Member's point, and affords the protection to those who do not want to come into contact with "perpetrators", as he put it.

Mr Basil McCrea also said that we do not want amendment No 5 to exclude people who have incurred, for example, a parking offence. The amendment gives a degree of discretion. It states that the commission may only appoint a person convicted of a criminal offence if it has obtained the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. That clearly implies that there is a degree of discretion. For a minor offence that has no bearing on the work of the commission, discretion can be exercised. Mr Lunn made a similar point. I hope that that clarification allays their concerns. We are not in the business of debarring everyone who has run across the law in the past, no matter how minor the misdemeanour, from holding this type of office.

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I give way to Mrs Long first.

Mrs Long: I hope that, in his answer to my question, the junior Minister will answer my colleague's question as well.

The junior Minister has mentioned that minor infractions of the law would not necessarily debar someone from serving as a member of the commission's staff, and he has mentioned the discretion available to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in approving someone's employment. He has said that this has been checked and is compatible with current legal and

employment rights. Where does it sit with, for example, expiry of conviction? Is it fair for someone who has committed a relatively minor offence in the past to have to go through additional scrutiny? Would that match up with current legal employment norms?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): It would be open to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree a protocol with the commission to deal with the points that Mrs Long makes. That is something we will look at. Mrs Long asks whether it is necessary, on each and every occasion, for the commission to refer, for this additional scrutiny, an employee if he or she has had any criminal conviction. We can look at how that might be dealt with in practical terms. A degree of discretion might be exercised. It is nevertheless important to have the safeguard built in, and that is why we have introduced amendment No 5.

Mr Lunn: Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, there is no obligation on the applicant to declare a conviction.

OFMDFM seems to be introducing, by way of implication, a new requirement to declare such convictions, no matter how old or how trivial, simply because a person may be applying for that position.

5.45 pm

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): As the Member will know, very often, when people apply for a public position, there is a question on the pro forma relating to convictions. I was recently appointed to the board of governors of a school in Lisburn, and I neglected to make a return about having a conviction. I was gently reminded by the board that it was a requirement to complete that section of the form. *[Interruption.]* I have a conviction from 1985 for a public order offence for taking part in a parade opposing the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I wear it as a badge of pride, I can assure you. *[Interruption.]*

Many employers today still ask for disclosure on criminal convictions. I take Mr Lunn's point, but he will note that amendment No 5 states:

"If it appears to the Commission that a person it proposes to appoint as an employee has at any time been convicted of a criminal offence".

There could be a scenario where someone does not disclose a criminal conviction. However, if it subsequently becomes clear that a person has a criminal conviction and that it is a matter of concern, that can be dealt with under this amendment. Nevertheless, I take Mr Lunn's point about spent convictions and about the requirement to disclose. If disclosure is required on the application form and an applicant fails to do that, it may result in consequences further down the line.

I take Basil McCrea's point about the bulk of the Troubles occurring before 1977. However, I am sure

that he would agree that someone who died in 1977, 1987 or 1997 as a result of terrorist violence is still a victim. I know that he was not using the point to suggest that there is a hierarchy; nevertheless, it is important that we treat people with respect and deal with victims' needs. Often, it is the victims who have lived the longest with their grief and pain who most need help and support, because little help was available in the past.

Mrs Long raised some issues of concern about the legal implications of the various amendments. Her view is that we need proportionality in our approach. I hope that my earlier remarks allayed some of her concerns.

I have sought to address the UUP amendments and argued why I do not feel that the amendments are necessarily the right way forward. I have also pointed out that, under paragraph 3(6) to schedule 1, the First Minister and deputy First Minister already have the power to remove someone from office as a member of the commission if they have been "convicted of a criminal offence." Furthermore, anyone applying for an appointment is already required to provide details of convictions.

In the future, circumstances may arise in which it would be inappropriate for an individual to be appointed as a member of the commission because he or she had committed an offence that was not conflict-related. Therefore, it is not considered that amendment No 3 adds any additional safeguards to those already contained in the Bill.

Amendment No 6 raises the issue of employees of the commission. I wish to put on record that we do not consider that the commission will employ a large number of staff. OFMDFM has tabled an amendment that will mean that the commission will not be able to employ anyone with any criminal convictions unless he or she has obtained the agreement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. That is wider than the amendment tabled by the UUP, and the Department believes that its amendment covers the types of offences specified in the previously tabled amendment but goes further and offers better protection.

I ask Members to reject amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6 and to support amendment No 5.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Members who participated in the debate for what were, in the main, measured comments and submissions. I am pleased that junior Minister Donaldson came out in the open and reminded Members about his criminal record — although it was a long time ago and under different circumstances.

Mr Kennedy moved amendment Nos 3, 4 and 6 with graphic details of issues relating to the three and a half or four decades of the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland. That campaign attempted to destroy the Province. Unfortunately, it was successful in

destroying many families and creating havoc and division among the communities in Northern Ireland.

I was disappointed that an amendment on the definition of a victim, which was tabled in the names of my colleague Danny Kennedy and I, was not accepted by the Business Office. The differences in Members' interpretation of a victim have been highlighted today. That was, for instance, highlighted by Mrs Kelly when she mentioned what Mr Moutray said about the innocent victims. My interpretation of a victim is close to that of Mr Moutray.

Mr Molloy also talked plainly about a victim. However, I am sure that Mr Molloy's definition of a victim is different to mine. It is unfortunate that there is still such division in today's society, but that has not happened by accident — it is a result of the three and a half or four decades of violence. Many Members and people outside the Chamber have first-hand experience of what it is to be a victim. Many were the innocent victims of the Troubles, and some were the perpetrators. Those people cannot be classified in the same definition of a victim.

My constituents in Fermanagh and South Tyrone are well aware of many incidents during the Troubles, not least the Enniskillen bomb in 1987, which sent many victims to their graves. Members will be aware of the recent media suggestions and inferences about who played a part in that atrocity.

Mr Kennedy detailed the reasons why the Ulster Unionist Party tabled the amendments and he explained the detail of them.

Junior Minister Donaldson said that his amendment deals with part of what our amendments seek to do. Paragraph 3(6) of schedule 1 to the Bill states that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has the power to remove from office a commissioner who has been convicted of a criminal offence. Amendment No 3, which was tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party, states that the situation should not even get that far — a person who has been convicted of a conflict-related offence should not be appointed as a commissioner.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The Member may recollect that I covered that very point in my comments earlier. I indicated that, since it is the First Minister and deputy First Minister who appoint the commissioners, they already have the power to decide not to appoint someone with a criminal conviction, and I can certainly say that they would not. Therefore, that point has already been well covered.

Mr Elliott: I thank the junior Minister for that clarification. That brings me to the next subject, which is the strange state of affairs in which OFMDFM has produced guidance for employers about recruiting people with conflict-related convictions. Employers

must rule out any pre-1998 conflict-related convictions from their deliberations. I am concerned that that guidance will also be relevant to the appointment of victims' commissioners and staff in the commission. The impetus behind the UUP amendments is our concern that OFMDFM can disregard any pre-1998 conflict-related convictions in making those appointments.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): For the life of me, I cannot understand where the Member is coming from on this matter. I am certainly not aware of any guidance, provision or anything else that the Member has indicated exists that would allow that to happen. The only thing that I can think of is the Belfast Agreement 1998, which distinguished between pre-1998 offences and those committed post-1998, for the purposes of releasing people convicted of such offences from prison. I am not aware of any guidance, any issue or any document from our Department that indicates the kind of situation or scenario that the Member has raised.

Mr Elliott: I am happy to provide the junior Minister with a copy of the document if he does not already have one; it comes from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister so I am assuming that he has it. The document quite clearly indicates that pre-1998 conflict-related convictions should not be taken into account when recruiting people, unless the conviction is materially relevant to the employment that is being sought. Obviously, therefore, my concern and that of the Ulster Unionist Party is that, due to this guidance, we may end up with people who are appointed either as commissioners or as members of commission staff who could actually be in — *[Interruption.]* I will give way.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. Paragraph 1·5 of the document concerned states, in summary:

“any conviction for a conflict-related offence that pre-dates the Good Friday Agreement (April 1998) should not be taken into account unless it is materially relevant to the employment being sought.”

Therefore, the Member is concerned that that provision may allow those with criminal convictions to obtain such positions; hence the need for our amendment.

Mr Elliott: That is exactly my reasoning, and that is the reasoning behind the Ulster Unionist Party proposing this amendment.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Members are at a disadvantage because no one has told us yet what document the Members are quoting from or whether it has any relevance to the victims' commission. However, I draw the Member's attention to amendment No 5, which states — and remember, if it is passed the amendment will become law and is therefore relevant to the victims' commission — that:

“If it appears to the Commission that a person it proposes to appoint as an employee has at any time been convicted”,

I repeat, it states: “at any time”. I would have thought that that amendment adequately covers the Member's concern, and therefore I do not see the relevance of his point.

Mr Elliott: For clarification, the document is dated 1 May 2007 and was produced by the good relations and reconciliation division of OFMDFM.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way, and I realise that he is being very patient about the number of interventions that are being made during his speech. I want to refer to the Member's point about the document that states that the only case in which pre-1998 convictions can be taken into account is when that conviction is materially relevant to the job that is sought.

Surely under the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, the only circumstances in which any convictions can be considered is when they are materially relevant to the job for which an individual has applied. For example, current employment legislation means that a convicted paedophile is permitted to work, but not with children. Someone convicted of theft or embezzlement is permitted to work, but not with money. Surely the issue is always one of material relevance, which would apply whether the offences were committed pre-1998 or post-1998.

6.00 pm

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for her intervention. Getting back to what junior Minister Donaldson said, it is clear that we have concerns — as he highlighted earlier — about OFMDFM having the power to be flexible in the appointment of commissioners or members of staff of the commission. If OFMDFM is working to its own employers' guidance, it has the powers to be flexible in appointing people who were convicted for terrorist-related or conflicted-related incidents pre-1998.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): This is like something from ‘Alice in Wonderland’.

Mr Elliott: That may be junior Minister Donaldson's perception, but we are making our case, which is why we tabled the amendments.

I already mentioned that Mrs Kelly highlighted the difference between the assertions of Mr Moutray and Mr Molloy. Mr Lunn was clear when he said that there was total confusion. I assume that he was talking about himself being totally confused. Perhaps that is nothing new, but that is an issue for him.

Mr Basil McCrea dealt in detail with his concerns about what an innocent victim may be subjected to if someone with a terrorist-related or conflict-related conviction were to become a victims' commissioner or a member of staff of the commission. That is an issue

that the UUP has been trying to highlight throughout this process.

Mrs Long stated that she was not convinced that there is a requirement to stop a convicted terrorist from becoming a commissioner or a member of staff of the commission. I thank Mr Donaldson for his summing up and for some of his clarifications.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. He has completely misunderstood what I said. I said that I understood why someone would not want an individual who was convicted of terrorist offences serving on, or working for, the commission. I also said that I believed that the proposed legislation — unamended — and other pieces of legislation already allow such sensitivities to be addressed, because they are a subset of criminal convictions.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for her assertion. Finally, on junior Minister Donaldson's summing up, I am pleased that he at least had the courage to table an amendment. It is unfortunate that such issues were not included in the Bill originally. Obviously, to some degree, people in OFMDFM are coming round to our way of thinking; perhaps, however, they still have some way to go.

Question put, That amendment No 3 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 23; Noes 58.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Kennedy.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Neeson, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 4 negatived.

Question put, That amendment No 5 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 50; Noes 30.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs oster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mrs Long.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 6 and amendment No 5 are mutually exclusive. As amendment No 5 has been made, I will not call amendment No 6. Amendment No 7 is dependent on amendment No 2 being made. Amendment No 2 has not been made, so I will not call amendment No 7.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I accept, bearing in mind the order in which amendments occurred, that it was correct to make amendment No 7 dependent on the passage of amendment No 2. However, should amendment No 8 be made, the issue of a chief commissioner is reinstated. Does that mean that it would be acceptable to submit the wording of amendment No 7 for the Further Consideration Stage?

Mr Speaker: Mr Ford may consider submitting another amendment if he wishes. *[Laughter.]*

Amendment No 8 has already been debated as part of the debate on the second group of amendments.

Question put, That amendment No 8 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 49; Noes 30.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mrs Long.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 8 made: In page 4, line 30, leave out paragraph 9 and insert

“9. — (1) The Commission may by standing orders make such provision as it thinks fit to regulate its own proceedings (including quorum).

(2) Standing orders may be made or amended by the Commission only with the agreement of all the members who vote on the matter.

(3) Standing orders shall provide for a decision on any of the following matters to be taken by the Commission only with the agreement of all the members who vote on the matter—

- (a) the provision of financial assistance under Article 7(1);
- (b) the preparation and submission under Article 8 of—
 - (i) a work programme;
 - (ii) a revised work programme; or
 - (iii) an amendment to an existing work programme.

(4) Standing orders shall provide for a decision on any other matter to be taken by the Commission on a simple majority of the members who vote on the matter.

(5) In making representations or recommendations under Article 7(4) in connection with a review under Article 6(2), the Commission shall in relation to each representation or recommendation specify whether it is made—

(a) with the agreement of all the members who voted on the matter; or

(b) on a simple majority of the members who voted on the matter.

(6) The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly—

(a) shall keep under review the working arrangements of the Commission;

(b) may—

(i) designate a member as Chief Commissioner;

(ii) at any time revoke that designation;

(c) may give directions to the Commission regulating its procedure (including directions supplementing or amending any standing orders of the Commission).” — [*The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson).*]

Mr Speaker: Amendment Nos 9 and 10 are mutually exclusive to amendment No 8, and as amendment No 8 has been made, I will not call amendment Nos 9 and 10.

Amendment No 11 can apply only if amendment Nos 8, 9 and 10 are not made. As that is not the case, I will not call amendment No 11.

Question put, That amendment No 12 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 22; Noes 49.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr A Maginness, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs D Kelly and Mr Lunn.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Elliott, Mr Kennedy, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the consideration stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Members have a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments, detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the Speaker's provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are four groups of amendments, and we shall debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 and 2, which deal with the duty of the library authority. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 3, 4 and 5, which deal with the membership of the library authority. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 6, 7 and 8, which deal with the secondments to the library authority. The fourth debate will be on amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11, which deal with technical changes.

I remind Members who intend to speak that, during the debates on the four groups of amendments, they should address the subject matter of the amendments in the group on which they wish to comment.

Once the initial debate on each group of amendments is completed, any subsequent amendments in that group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each amendment will be put without further debate.

The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Duty of Authority to provide library service)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 2, line 2, after "provide a" insert "comprehensive and efficient".

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 2, line 16, at end insert

"() maintaining a collection of library materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland;" — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate — amendment No 1, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment No 2. The amendments deal with qualifying the duties of the library authority and add a new duty to consider the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Clause 2 will determine the responsibilities of the library authority. It places a statutory duty on the library authority to provide a public library service to persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.

The current legislation requires the education and library boards to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service. That phrase was dropped from the new draft legislation in favour of describing what is meant by provision of a comprehensive library service more fully, as included in clause 2(2). Having listened to the debate on this issue in the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I consider that that phrase emphasises the duty, as described. Amendment No 1 proposes to reinstate the phrase “comprehensive and efficient”.

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

Amendment No 2 concerns the requirement of the library authority to make a range of material available to meet the general needs of adults and children. That includes fictional, historical and contemporary works, as well as a wide range of reference material. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered that the responsibility of the library authority to collect material relevant to the cultural history of Northern Ireland should be specified in the legislation. Amendment No 2 will give the library authority power to include the collection of materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I welcome the opportunity to address the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

The stated purposes of the Libraries Bill are to:

“Provide for the establishment and functions of the Northern Ireland Library Authority; to enable the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to make grants in connection with the provision of library services; and for connected purposes.”

The Libraries Bill was referred to the Committee on 19 June 2007. It was considered at 16 separate meetings. A total of 18 organisations responded to a request for written evidence, and the Committee — in addition to departmental officials — took oral evidence from 10 organisations before commencing the detailed clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill.

I thank all of the individuals and organisations that provided written evidence, those who came and gave oral evidence to the Committee, and the officials who took the Committee through the detailed provisions of the Bill over a number of meetings. I commend the Committee members for their work in considering the detail of the Bill, and I thank the Committee staff for their support.

The Committee undertook its clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill during its Committee Stage, and concluded that it was content to support all of the provisions of the Bill with the exception of those in clause 2, schedule 1, and schedule 3. All of the

amendments to the Bill have been agreed between the Department and the Committee. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister for agreeing to include the amendments, as proposed. The Committee welcomes the amendments, and commends them to the House.

The first grouping of amendments relate to clause 2. The Committee had a number of concerns about that clause. Clause 2(1) states that:

“It shall be the duty of the Authority to provide a public library service”.

The Committee and several witnesses requested inclusion of the words “comprehensive and efficient”. It was felt that the inclusion of those words in the Bill would serve two purposes. First, it would align the Bill with legislation governing library services in England, Scotland and Wales, as is the case with current legislation that governs public libraries here.

It would make explicit two requirements. The inclusion of the word “comprehensive” means that the Library Service has to be inclusive of everyone, whether able-bodied people, people with disabilities, the rural community and so on. The word “efficient” concerns public service reform, and it was agreed that there was a danger of assuming that the service would be efficient. The Committee wrote to the Minister proposing that he include the words in the clause, and he agreed to do so.

7.00 pm

The Committee was not content that clause 2(2) as worded provided adequate protection of reference material and felt that the clause should be expanded to refer to protecting reference material of regional significance. The Committee was keen that the legislation should include provision to make it the responsibility of the library authority to ensure that a collection of relevant material of regional significance will be in existence and will be maintained. Witnesses expressed concern that the custodial role of libraries in keeping reference material and archives was not being reflected in the Bill. Following consultation with the Minister, it was agreed that an additional paragraph would be added to the list of desirable functions.

Mr McCausland: I want to draw attention to amendment No 2, which the Minister and the Chairperson mentioned. This amendment refers to the specific requirement that the library authority would maintain a collection of library materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland, which is an important aspect of the authority’s role in providing a comprehensive service to the people of Northern Ireland.

It is unfortunate that many books that are relevant to the history and cultural heritage of Northern Ireland are not available to students and laypeople in Northern Ireland. There is no national library in Northern Ireland, so it is imperative that the legislation contains a clause

that places a special responsibility on the authority to ensure that there is a collection of such materials.

It is important to create a sense of place and pride among people in local communities by enabling them to read about their local history and heritage. It is important to preserve such material as it also affirms people's identity and facilitates research. It helps in the development of cultural tourism and the establishment of connections between people in Ulster and further afield. One of the important elements of that cultural heritage is the story of the Ulster diaspora; the people who have left these shores and travelled to so many countries around the world.

I recently purchased two books on the internet, which were biographies of a man called Whitelaw Reid, who was once the American ambassador in Britain and one of the main newspapermen in America at the end of the nineteenth century. He is often described in publications as being of Scottish descent, but reading the biographies, one suddenly discovers that his roots were actually in County Tyrone. That is an example of an individual who we can now claim as a good Ulster Scot. He was a man who travelled to another country and made an important contribution there — and here as well.

I might add that he was also a great supporter of the Ulster unionist position, although it may not please the Committee Chairman quite so much to hear that. Whitelaw Reid was a remarkable individual, and we are now aware of the fact that his roots were here. That is part of our story and part of the work that must be done to recover information about our heritage. I am very pleased that that provision will now be included in the legislation.

Mr McCarthy: The hour is late, so I will simply welcome the amendments that have been put forward by the Minister, and I fully support the comments made by the Chairperson.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Members who have contributed to the debate for doing so, and for their brevity. I will seek to match that. I consider that these amendments strengthen the legislation.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Amendment No 2 made: In page 2, line 16, at end insert

“() maintaining a collection of library materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland;” — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1 (The Northern Ireland Library Authority)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. The first is amendment No 3, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 4 and 5. These amendments deal with the number of members on the library authority, and with representation from district councils.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I beg to move amendment No 3: In schedule 1, page 8, leave out line 15 and insert

“(b) not more than 18 other members,”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 4: In schedule 1, page 8, line 18, after “secure” insert

“(a) that at any time a majority of members are councillors (within the meaning of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (c. 9)); and

(b)” — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

No 5: In schedule 1, page 8, line 19, at end insert

“(3) The Department may by order subject to negative resolution amend sub-paragraph (1)(b) by substituting for the number specified there such other number as may be specified in the order.” — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Paragraph 2 of schedule 1 provides for the composition of the board of the library authority. Members of the board will have collective responsibility for overseeing the exercising of the authority's responsibilities as provided for in this Bill and in other legislation. They will also have responsibility for ensuring the effective use and monitoring of public money. Board members will be expected to provide leadership, support and guidance, and continuity of direction and management, and to promote the library authority's core values, policies and objectives.

I support the trend towards smaller, more focused boards, but I have listened to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and I recognise that a chairperson plus a maximum of 14 members might not be sufficient to provide the library authority with the committee structure that it might need. Amendment No 3, therefore, increases the number of members on the board to a chairperson plus up to 18 others.

Since it is linked, I shall now turn to amendment No 5. As this is a new body, I consider that there is a need to make provision to change the number of members should that be necessary. I propose that this be achieved by order of the Assembly.

I turn now to amendment No 4. Paragraph 2 of schedule 1 makes provision for board members to be appointed on the basis of experience relevant to the functions of the library authority. At the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, we discussed the arrangements that the library authority will set up to ensure local

consultation about library services. These arrangements will apply until the community planning responsibilities of the new councils are established.

We also discussed how the local authority dimension might be brought to the board. Councillors bring to the table experience of delivery at local level. Representation of councillors on the board will also ensure a geographic spread of members to reflect the differing needs of rural and urban areas. I concluded, therefore, that district councillors will be a valuable addition to the board of the library authority. I must emphasise, however, that their role will be for the Library Service as a whole, and not as representatives of their own areas. Amendment No 4 provides for a majority of the board to be selected from applicants who meet the relevant criteria for appointment, and who are also district councillors.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Committee was concerned about the arrangements for membership of the authority as set out in schedule 1, paragraph 2. The paragraph specifies the number of members and the experience required.

The Committee raised issues about the size of the authority: the Bill specifies that it should have between seven and 14 members in addition to the chairperson. The Committee wrote to the Minister and asked that he amend the legislation to allow for a maximum of 17 or 19 members, most of whom should be elected local representatives, and that the chairperson should always be an elected local representative.

Members felt that local representatives bring to public bodies a dimension that cannot easily be brought by others, namely their interactivity with the public. Witnesses suggested that the figure of seven to 14 was too small for several reasons, such as that there would not be enough members to form subcommittees or to take through strategic changes as the authority establishes itself over the next few years. The authority must be representative of geographical spread and include members from all areas.

Following consultation, the Minister agreed to the Committee's recommendation that the majority of board members should be elected representatives of local government authorities or district councils.

The Committee agreed that an additional sub-paragraph was required to allow the Department the flexibility and scope to introduce secondary legislation to, if necessary, specify changes in numbers in sub-paragraph 1(b). Any such legislation must, of course, come before the Assembly for approval.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill and thank the Chairperson of the Committee for his earlier comments.

Elected representatives are aware that libraries are part of the life of the community. For example, although Newtownards library is limited in scope, many people use its facilities to access the Internet, look up books for school projects, pick bedtime stories for children or simply broaden the mind in retirement. It is good that people of all ages use the library.

I welcome the Bill, which will make library services and facilities available to more people. I am glad that elected representatives will help the library authority make decisions. I felt strongly about that matter in the Committee, as did the Chairperson and several other members. It is vital to ensure public accountability, and the placement of elected representatives will help to achieve that accountability. I support the Minister's decision to limit membership of the authority to a maximum of 18. Eleven political members will represent the 11 council areas. It is good news that the Committee can shape legislation and can influence the Minister's intentions, deliberations and conclusions.

It is important that all communities feel that they have access to the service. Some time ago, I contacted the Minister about the mobile library service. He responded positively, which demonstrated that elected representatives have influence and can bring about change. As a result, the mobile library will open for longer hours to the benefit of the community. That is a clear representation of what the library authority and the Minister's power can do. That change arose because of community access to elected representatives and allowed the public to be part of the process.

Even before the establishment of the new membership of the library authority, it is important that the Minister reconsiders — again through the elected representatives — the limited scope of Newtownards library. The Minister must address the matter of the newbuild at the old Castle Garden Primary School site. I urge that the old school building be demolished on health and safety grounds as a matter of urgency and a state-of-the-art library built as soon as possible to benefit us all.

Another bonus of the Libraries Bill is the savings of £600,000 in 2009-2010, and £1.2 million in 2010-11 — the Minister will, perhaps, comment on that. Although there will be a set-up cost, after that initial output, the Minister will be able to deliver savings and efficiencies, which means more funding for the front line and increased support for sporting and cultural events. We should congratulate the Minister on demonstrating leadership, achieving saving and increasing efficiency. That saving will add to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as a whole.

I support the Bill and the benefits that it will bring to the community, and I urge all Members to do likewise.

Mr Weir: In supporting the amendments, I will not request the demolition of any school buildings in

North Down. I look forward, however, to the imminent opening of the refurbished Bangor Carnegie Library in Hamilton Road. I am familiar with that area and, indeed, see that site every Sunday morning.

I have the dubious honour of being the first Member to speak who is neither Minister nor member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. If the Chief Whip of the DUP reads the Hansard report tomorrow, I want to clarify that I am not making a bid to get onto that Committee.

7.15 pm

Mr Boylan: Is the Member making a bid for a ministerial post?

Mr Weir: I am always open to the offer of a ministerial post, but that is unlikely to happen.

It is perhaps appropriate that we are debating libraries provision at what might be described as an overdue hour. Indeed, I hope that we will not be fined. In welcoming the amendments, I should declare an interest, given that we are talking about council representation. I am a member of North Down Borough Council and a vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. I am not sure whether I should also declare an interest as a former member of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, because we are in some sort of —

A Member: Limbo.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Purgatory.

Mr Weir: I do not know whether it is purgatory or limbo, but I have heard it described in other language that might not be appropriate in the House.

I welcome the proposals. In the long run, I would like libraries to be part of a suite of facilities that are offered by local councils on a shared-service basis. We are all aware of the major challenges that will face local government in 2011. As such, the measures that the Minister is proposing in the Bill to ensure that there is proper democratic accountability, and that the composition of the libraries authority consists of a majority of locally elected councillors, are welcome steps.

For many years, particularly under direct rule, many people were frustrated with the various quangos that were either exclusively made up of unelected people or had a token level — or at best, as in the case of the education and library boards, a minority — of elected representation. That led to a degree of frustration, and, perhaps, among those elected representatives, a temptation to be irresponsible, because they knew that the independent members could outvote them. However, it also led to a democratic deficit in society.

I welcome the proposal, in line with the review of public administration announcement, that there will be a

majority of councillors — presumably 11 — on the board of the new library authority. That will ensure that an appropriate level of responsibility and democratic accountability is maintained. Notwithstanding the benefits that that will bring to the Library Service, it will be a valuable lesson for local councillors in developing a shared service. Judging by the amendments, it is clear that the Minister and the Committee have worked well together to produce this outcome.

Furthermore, a vital precedent has been created for other Departments. For example, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister for Employment and Learning are examining various bodies in their Departments to determine whether they can be democratised. In particular, I would look to the embryonic education and skills authority, which will operate under the aegis of the Department of Education. A clear signal should be sent out that the precedent that is being set today in respect of the libraries authority should be followed.

As a former member of one of the education and library boards, I know that there was always a concern that their core business was concentrated in schools and, particularly, that there were budgetary pressures when it came to special needs provision. The libraries and the Youth Service were perhaps always seen as being semi-detached from the main business of the education and library boards. When funding pressures arose, those were the easiest areas in which to make cuts. When it came to special needs provision, the libraries were seen as a soft target. The establishment of a libraries authority that is separate, yet democratically accountable, will ensure that its budget will be ring-fenced and will not be subject to other educational pressures. That is a progressive step forward. I welcome amendment Nos 3, 4, and 5 and the Bill that is before us.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Once again, I thank those Members who have contributed to the debate. I wish to ensure that the board of the library authority contains the full range of skills and experience that is required to deliver a public service with a budget of around £35 million. The board must also have adequate experience to deliver services at the local level. That is why I value, and wish to see, district council representatives drilling down to, and dealing with, local issues that others might not be aware of.

There is increasing awareness of the responsibilities of members of boards and public bodies, which has focused attention on how such members are appointed. The library authority will be a non-departmental public body, and the appointment of its members will be regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland. That means, among other things, that appointments will be made through competition, with selection based on merit, which will be judged against criteria based on skills, experiences or

qualities that will match the needs of the body in question. Therefore, in effect, there will be two competitions for board members; one for the general public, and one for the places reserved for district councillors. All appointments will be made following a selection process that will be based on application, sift and interview. In addition, there will be a separate competition for the board chairperson.

I welcome the remarks made about the benefits of having a single library authority; they have been well rehearsed. That body will be focused solely on the delivery of quality library services. It will have its own budget, from which people will not be able to take hundreds of thousands, or millions, of pounds. It will compete in the comprehensive spending review, and its budget will be set.

The authority's sole focus will be on the delivery of library services that are consistent throughout Northern Ireland. People should be able to get the same services whether they live in rural or urban areas. The books will belong to the library service of Northern Ireland, rather than to a particular education and library board. Therefore, there will be significant advantages for library services.

There will also be significant efficiencies. The Department is on target to save £600,000 in the first year of service, and £1.2 million in the following year. I am happy to make those savings on the basis that front-line service will remain of the same quality and that those efficiencies will deliver better services in the libraries. That is what the review of public administration must be about — reducing administration and improving services.

Amendment No 3 agreed to.

Amendment No 4 made: In page 8, line 18, after “secure” insert

“(a) that at any time a majority of members are councillors (within the meaning of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (c. 9)); and

(b)” — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

Amendment No 5 made: In page 8, line 19, at end insert

“(3) The Department may by order subject to negative resolution amend sub-paragraph (1)(b) by substituting for the number specified there such other number as may be specified in the order.” — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. Amendment No 6 deals with secondments from the Northern Ireland Civil Service, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 7 and 8, which are consequential amendments. I call the Minister to move amendment No 6 and to address amendment Nos 7 and 8.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I beg to move amendment No 6: In page 9, line 14, leave out paragraph 6.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 7: In page 10, line 14, leave out from “or” to end of line 16. — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

No 8: In page 10, line 19, leave out from “or” to end of line 21. — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

Paragraph 6 of schedule 1, as drafted, enables the library authority to second staff from the Northern Ireland Civil Service. A secondment is a tripartite agreement between two employers and one employee. According to legal advice, that does not require any specific legislative basis, provided the authority has the power to engage staff and to seek assistance from elsewhere, for which the Libraries Bill makes provision under paragraphs 5 and 8, respectively. Amendment No 6 proposes the removal of paragraph 6.

Regarding amendment Nos 7 and 8, paragraph 10 enables the board of the library authority to delegate functions to a committee or to employees. As currently drafted, it refers to:

“any person seconded ... in accordance with arrangements made under paragraph 6.”

Provided the Assembly agrees to remove paragraph 6, those references are no longer necessary.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 7 and 8 are dependent on amendment No 6 being made. If amendment No 6 is not made, I will not call amendment Nos 7 and 8.

Amendment No 6 agreed to.

Amendment No 7 made: In page 10, line 14, leave out from “or” to end of line 16. — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

Amendment No 8 made: In page 10, line 19, leave out from “or” to end of line 21. — *[The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).]*

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 2 (Transfer schemes)

Mr P Ramsey: I, too, acknowledge the contribution of the Committee staff in steering us through the legislation, and, indeed, the co-operation of the Minister and the Department.

It is important to acknowledge the Minister's comments about the continued provision of an excellent library service. Given the financial concerns across the Library Service, we hope that the achievement of efficiency will not mean a reduction in the service. We

want educational and cultural centres of excellence to be rolled out throughout both urban and rural areas.

One of the major concerns that has been raised in debates in recent months regards the morale and motivation of staff. Indeed, we received a delegation from Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) on that matter. Paragraph 19 of the executive summary of the Committee's report on the Bill records that NIPSA sought a number of amendments to schedule 2. NIPSA sought those changes on the basis of sound legal advice. The Minister assured the Committee that schedule 2, as drafted, reflected appropriate legal advice that he had received.

Will the Minister assure us that schedule 2 of the Bill, as drafted, will — in line with the Public Service Commission's recommendations — fully protect the interests of existing staff on transfer to the library authority?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Many of the staff transferring to the new authority will be protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). Nevertheless, we acknowledge the concern that strict application of the law may lead to uncertainty in some cases. For that reason, it is proposed to legislate that all transfers of staff be treated as "relevant transfers" for the purposes of TUPE. Paragraph 4(2) of schedule 2 is quite specific in that regard:

"The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (S.I. 2006/246) apply to the transfer whether or not the transfer would, apart from this paragraph, be a relevant transfer for the purposes of those regulations."

I am content, therefore, that that is the case.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

7.30 pm

Schedule 3 (Amendments)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We come to the fourth group of amendments for debate — amendment No 9, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 10 and 11, which are the two other technical amendments in this group.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I beg to move amendment No 9: In page 14, line 22, at end insert

"The Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 (NI 14)

. In Article 67 after 'Library Boards' insert ', the Northern Ireland Library Authority'." — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled list:

No 10: In page 14, line 27, at end insert

"The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (NI 28)

. In Schedule 13 after the entry relating to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board insert 'The Northern Ireland Library Authority.'" — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

No 11: In page 14, line 32, at end insert

"The Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (NI 16)

. In Article 78(2) after sub-paragraph (a) insert '(aa) the Northern Ireland Library Authority;'." — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Since the Bill was drafted, my officials have had more time to consider other legislation that requires change consequent on the creation of the Northern Ireland library authority. Amendment No 9 and amendment Nos 10 and 11 are intended to ensure that the new library authority is included, where appropriate, in other legislation.

Amendment No 9 agreed to.

Amendment No 10 made: In page 14, line 27, at end insert

"The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (NI 28)

. In Schedule 13 after the entry relating to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board insert 'The Northern Ireland Library Authority.'" — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Amendment No 11 made: In page 14, line 32, at end insert

"The Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (NI 16)

. In Article 78(2) after sub-paragraph (a) insert '(aa) the Northern Ireland Library Authority;'." — [*The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots).*]

Schedule 3, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Libraries Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that under Standing Order 35(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any further amendments. One amendment has been tabled. Members will have received a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments, which provides details of the amendment. The amendment requires the commissioner to consult all 26 district councils and cause a public hearing to be held in each of the district council areas. I call Mr Danny Kennedy to move amendment No 1.

Mr Kennedy: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, I invite you to call Mr Roy Beggs to move the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Roy Beggs.

Mr Beggs: I beg to move amendment No 1: In clause 2, page 2, leave out lines 25 to 28 and insert

“(b) that he will consult each of the 26 district councils, and

(c) that he will in due course publish provisional recommendations and cause a public hearing to be held in each of the 26 local government districts mentioned in section 1(2) of the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.”

I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

The Minister’s response to the amendments that were tabled last week was less than constructive — none was adopted. I hope that in this debate, she will show more openness of mind and that she will listen. Her response, along with those of her party colleagues and Sinn Féin members, to all the amendments that were tabled in good faith was regrettable. We are in danger of setting a precedent of confrontational, power-bloc politics on issues of administrative competence instead of ensuring that we get the best legislation possible.

As it is likely to be many decades before there will again be such a significant reorganisation of local government, it is essential that there is detailed and widespread consultation.

The amendment is designed to encourage the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to engage directly with existing local councils and with the public. The amendment will also encourage local councils and the public to interact with the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

If there were to be only one such meeting per new council area, the people in my constituency from Larne and Carrickfergus would have to travel to Ballymena or vice versa. Therefore, we must ensure that there is widespread consultation, and it is with that in mind that I have put my name to the amendment. It is hoped that by agreeing the amendment, there will be direct

engagement with every one of the 26 local government districts in Northern Ireland.

In her responses to the amendments tabled previously by the UUP, the Minister quoted the Boundary Committee for England’s ‘Electoral reviews: Technical guidance.’ However, that guidance was given to encourage full and detailed arguments and was, in no way, designed to usurp the decisions of Parliament that had directed the role of a boundary commissioner. Therefore, it was inappropriate for her to use that particular quotation.

The Minister quoted directly from that source when she said:

“Effective and convenient local government is...difficult to define”.

That was in paragraph 5.24 of the report. It is unfortunate that the Minister omitted the very next line, which states:

“This is the fundamental consideration of the start of a review when we take our decision about council size.”

The UUP’s intention in tabling the amendment is to ensure the best possible outcome for local government in Northern Ireland, which I hope will be appreciated when the matter is considered by all concerned. We are enthusiastic supporters of strong, accountable and effective local government. Ensuring widespread consultation in each of the 26 existing local council areas will be part of the process of getting future boundaries correct.

The proposed new paragraph 6(2)(b) of schedule 4 to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 will make it obligatory for the commissioner to consult with the 26 existing councils. That is of paramount importance, as our local councils hold a wealth of experience and information on local governance in Northern Ireland.

I am not aware of the content of the discussions that took place when the council boundaries were last drawn up. However, in my constituency, Island Magee was assigned to Larne — the journey to which requires a ferry trip — when the nearest town is Whitehead. To avoid situations such as this, there must be effective local discussions that will enable the right decisions to be made and the views of local councils and people to be taken in an appropriate fashion. Not to have meaningful consultation would be detrimental to the outcome of the commissioner’s review and, subsequently, the working of local government.

The Minister will, no doubt, refer to the fact that, under current legislation, the commissioner can invite consultations from existing local councils. By making that instruction explicit, we can better guarantee that the voices of local representatives, councils and indeed the public will be heard and will be taken into consideration.

However, those consultations must be accessible to all. Not everyone is comfortable putting issues in writing;

not everyone would be willing to travel many miles to attend a public consultation. Therefore, it would be much better if consultations were more local.

Today, the Minister has an opportunity to send a message to local councillors and communities that she is serious about listening to them about the structure that their local government will take. For that to happen, the Minister and her Sinn Féin partners need to have an open mind and should not be tied rigidly to the deal made between the DUP and Sinn Féin. Therefore, I hope that there are listening ears; people prepared to make improvements and amendments that will assist the process through which we are going.

During the Bill's Consideration Stage last week, there was much debate about the need to consider the identity and affinities of local communities when the boundaries of the 11 new councils are drawn up. Under the current legislation, the new commissioner is obliged to hold a public hearing in each of those proposed 11 districts. It would be better if such a hearing were held in each of the current 26 electoral districts.

Mr Weir: Why would it be better?

Mr Beggs: I believe in openness and in assisting the public to contribute to important decisions that will have a far-reaching effect on their areas. Local government in Northern Ireland should not be remotely determined here. The process will be improved if the commissioner listens to the people and gives them a better understanding of his decisions. That will be a much healthier process.

Mr Weir: What is preventing the boundary commissioner from listening to people now?

Mr Beggs: It seems that the Member has his ears closed. I have already said that the Bill requires the commissioner to hold a meeting in each of the new 11 council areas, and that it would be much better to extend those meetings to the 26 council areas in Northern Ireland. Adopting the amendment will ensure that that happens. There should be appropriate consultation on issues that affect the local government districts and the setting of ward boundaries. It is important that there be openness. Such people as Peter Weir should be listening to those discussions, rather than holding rigidly to a deal that has already been made. It would be much better if constructive suggestions could be taken on board, and I hope that that will be the case.

The people of Northern Ireland have been served by a 26-council model since 1972, and the current council boundaries define how people politically associate themselves with their local government authorities. In the interest of the most effective and inclusive public consultation process, therefore, it is sensible, logical and right that public hearings should be held in each of the 26 council districts.

By doing so, the commissioner would be better able to gauge the strength of feeling and argument in an existing council area. Furthermore, the commissioner would be better engaged in assessing what might or might not be appropriate. If the public consultations were held in the 11-council format, views would be merged into wide areas rather than concentrated on one issue in a local community. Issues that are relevant to areas 20 miles away or more could be discussed in my constituency of East Antrim, for instance, but not everyone will be prepared to sit through a long public consultation on an area that is remote to their community.

This amendment will increase the political buy-in and legitimacy of the new council model, and improve its likelihood of future success. It will allow the commissioner to gain a good understanding of local feelings, identities and communities in the existing areas. It will also enable the commissioner to understand fully any geographical and infrastructural issues that exist in local government, and allow him or her to understand how to amalgamate the 26 councils, their boundaries, and guidance on the wards into the proposed 11-council model.

Accepting the amendment would be an act of generosity to the existing councils and councillors who have served the community for several decades. It would give them a meaningful and correct platform on which to make their cases to the commissioner.

Some Members are relatively new councillors, as I am — this is only my second term — but others have served for longer periods. Listening to them, to see whether improvements can be made, would be the right thing to do. I hope that, in considering that issue, the Minister will adopt a more open frame of mind than previously.

7.45 pm

Although the Ulster Unionist Party always favoured a 15-council model, it accepts the political reality of the decision that is being made by the two largest parties in the Assembly. We have sought, in good faith, to improve the legislation. So far, all such attempts — made by any party, for that matter — have been met with derision from the Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Féin, and even, regrettably, the Minister.

The Minister and the current dominant parties in the Executive are also in danger of setting an unnecessary precedent of accelerating all controversial legislation through the Assembly, while refusing to contemplate any amendments whatsoever. That is an unparliamentary approach and will undermine the Assembly. For those reasons, I ask the Minister to consider the amendment carefully. I hope that the Minister and all Members will support the amendment.

Mr Ross: Perhaps I am not feeling particularly generous this evening, because I rise to speak against the amendment that has been tabled by the Ulster Unionist

Party, which I consider to be totally unnecessary. I also note that, in the amendment, the Ulster Unionist Party has stated “that he will consult” and that “he will in due course” — I know that the UUP does not have any female MLAs in its Assembly team, but I hope that it is not being sexist in the assumption that the commissioner will be a male.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member accept that, on at least one occasion, I said “he or she”?

Mr Ross: I am glad that the Member said that, but it was not in the text of the amendment.

As Mr Beggs said, the public consultation aspect of the legislation is imperative, as is the need to enable as many members of the public as possible to come to the meetings. The public consultation process will allow members of the public to attend meetings in their own proposed new council area and, if they feel suitably exercised to do so, attend meetings in any other area of the Province — in fact, they could attend all 11 or more, if they really wanted to comment on them.

The amendment is unnecessary because all the existing 26 councils will be consulted as part of the normal process — that will happen anyway. All councillors will be able to express their views, as can individuals throughout Northern Ireland. The second part of the amendment calls for public hearings to be held in each of the 26 existing council areas in the Province. I am at a loss as to why that should be the case.

We are moving towards the establishment of 11 new councils, and it is vital that people in those new local government districts can meet to decide on and debate their new relationships and their new boundaries. It would not make much sense to hold public meetings in existing council areas that may be split across two — or possibly three — new councils, because there would be no common purpose to those meetings, whereas, if the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner were to hold consultation meetings in the new areas, he would be able to hear from those most affected by the new council boundaries.

There is also a question as to why we need to hold 26 separate meetings, when we can hold significantly fewer and still reach the same people. Indeed, there would be a significant additional financial impact if we were to hold 26 meetings.

Mr Beggs: The Member has indicated that anyone can travel to any location in the new 11 district council areas. Has he tried to travel from Ballymena to Carrickfergus or, for that matter, from Carrickfergus to Ballymena? That may be what people will have to do in order to reach a location where such a hearing is happening.

Mr Ross: I have made that journey, and I have used my car to do so. Mr Beggs also referred to that issue in his opening comments, but I must emphasise that, in

areas where there may be concerns that some people will not be able to get to public meetings or it is deemed that a sizeable number of people will be discouraged from attending meetings because of distance or some other factor, the commissioner has at his discretion the power to arrange additional meetings, as well as the 11 that have been set.

The commissioner can hold as many meetings as he wants or deems necessary. Therefore, the commissioner could hold two meetings in the East Antrim area if he deemed that there was a problem.

Mr Weir: Or she.

Mr Ross: He or she, of course. *[Laughter.]*

I therefore do not see the need for the UUP amendment, and do not believe that it would benefit or improve the Bill in its current state. I oppose the amendment.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I oppose the amendment. What Mr Beggs said was, for the most part, a rehearsal of previous contributions. As my colleague Carál Ní Chuilín would say, it was a single transferable speech. We have already had the argument about whether there should be 11, 15 or 26 local councils, and we are now attempting to accelerate the establishment of the new local councils through the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

As has been pointed out, the new Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will have a statutory obligation to hold the appropriate public inquiries when necessary, and will do so in the newly defined council areas. I fail to see the sense in making the argument that people cannot travel from Ballymena to Carrickfergus or Whitehead, and so on.

Mr Beggs: I suggest that the Member searches the Translink website to find out how difficult it is to travel to and from those areas using public transport.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member. Perhaps I will take up that issue with my colleague Conor Murphy in due course. In all seriousness, should people wish to take issue with a matter that is of considerable importance to the future of local government, the distances between such areas should not be prohibitive.

The Bill is about delivering services to the public and being responsive to the public’s needs. We want to ensure that the general public has access not only to the services in the future, but that they have some say in the process of the establishment of the new councils. Therefore, I accept that the issue is about the general public, but I cannot see the wisdom in suggesting that people are unable to travel and that, as a result, the current proposals will militate against people having their say.

It has been pointed out that people from the 26 current district council areas who wish to make a submission or presentation will be free to do so. It is wrong and foolhardy to suggest that all or many of the 26 councils have an agreed position on the issue. Mr Beggs should be aware, as a result of the debates in the House over a considerable time, that a number of the district councils do not agree about the future of local government. To be aware that a number of those councils cannot agree on that issue, and to then obligate an incoming Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to conduct a public hearing, as outlined in the amendment, is nonsense.

The amendment is fundamentally flawed, and it will add nothing to the role of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. Furthermore, it will not add any additional information that the commissioner will be able to avail himself or herself of that will not be available from any of the other public inquiries that will undoubtedly be held in due course.

As I said, Sinn Féin opposes the amendment, which is unnecessary and would simply obligate an incoming commissioner to conduct hearings that are unnecessary, fruitless and would simply, at best, duplicate the public inquiries that will rightly be held in the areas in which it is appropriate to do so.

Mr Ford: On reading the amendment, I had considerable sympathy with the intentions of those who tabled it. It seems to me that they are seeking to address the same point that was made from these Benches during the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Only 11 districts are listed in clause 1(2) of the Bill, rather than a grouping of one to four councils in each of those areas that would have created the opportunity of a greater degree of flexibility. The House, in its usual wisdom, last week rejected the amendment that would have addressed that issue. We are now considering the issue as to how to deal with the fact that there are real boundary issues with a number of those points.

Various places have been mentioned during discussions at different times. Mr Ross, as an argument against conducting a hearing in a particular area, said that a council may be split three ways. If there are serious issues about how existing patterns of councils will fit into the new pattern, that should be used as an argument in favour of having a local discussion, because such a discussion could concentrate on that particular issue.

The difficulty with the Ulster Unionist Party amendment is that it prescribes that there should be a hearing in each of the 26 council areas.

Taking the example of my council area — and I declare an interest, belatedly, as a member of Antrim Borough Council — there are several excellent hotels in the vicinity of Templepatrick that could cater adequately for the people of Antrim and Newtownabbey, given that it is a relatively short distance between those two towns.

On the other hand, areas have been mentioned in which there is considerably more difference. On the presumption that a hearing will be held in the Newry and Mourne District Council area, given that it is the larger centre, the issue of how Down District Council relates to Newry and Mourne District Council seems to merit a more detailed inquiry. Such an inquiry should consider the northern boundary of Down District Council and how it relates to what we must call greater North Down. I say that in the absence of Mr Shannon, who may wish the area to be called “Greater Ards”. At least Mr Weir agrees.

Those issues could be better addressed by holding local public hearings during which they are considered. I was interested when Mr Ross said that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner may want more than one hearing to be held in more than the 11 new council areas. That is my understanding of the law. However, the problem is that recent precedent does not suggest that that is likely to happen. When the legislation states that there shall be 11 public hearings, it is unlikely that the commissioner will interpret that there should be more than 11.

It would be some kind of reassurance if the Minister were to respond in a way that suggests that she will encourage the commissioner to consider the necessity of holding more than 11 public hearings. On a previous occasion, I discussed whether Castlederg leans more towards Strabane or Omagh — and hence, more towards Derry or Fermanagh — on the current configuration. Compared with a more local hearing, I do not see how any hearing that is held in Derry or Enniskillen could rationalise the Omagh/Strabane boundary in any meaningful way.

In addition to holding those 11 hearings, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner should be encouraged to consider other places in which hearings may be necessary. That should be considered now, rather than waiting until provisional recommendations are, in many cases, almost finalised.

That is why there is considerable merit in the intention behind the Ulster Unionist Party amendment. However, given that hearings are not required for several cases, I fear that 26 full hearings would be too many. I am interested in hearing the Minister’s response to that point. I would then like to hear the proposers of the amendment explain how that idea would fit into making something that is practical and workable and that would not take excessive time.

Mr I McCrea: I declare an interest as a councillor on Cookstown District Council and as a member of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

I oppose the amendment. I am somewhat confused as to what the Members hope to achieve, as the Bill states that the commissioner is required, as a minimum,

to hold a public meeting in each of the 11 new districts. I accept what Mr Ford said, and the Minister can clarify whether she will encourage the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to hold extra meetings. That is a necessary step, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that she will do that.

When considering the amendment, I pondered on what it would mean for my constituency of Mid Ulster. If, as the amendment suggests, a public hearing is to be held in each of the local government districts, there would be a public hearing somewhere in each of the three district council areas of Magherafelt District Council, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council and Cookstown District Council. To put that in context, and given that the commissioner is required to hold a public meeting in each of the 11 new districts, if such a hearing were held in Cookstown, which is the most central area within those new boundary lines, the people of Magherafelt and Dungannon would not have too far to travel. It is approximately 10 miles from each of those town centres to Cookstown.

The amendment was not well thought-through, but — and I speak in hope — surely there is enough common sense on the Ulster Unionist Party Benches to realise that the Bill provides exactly what they ask for, only more effectively and efficiently. I ask the Minister to outline some of the costs that are associated with public hearings.

The intention of the Bill is not to waste time or money duplicating public hearings; it is to give everybody the opportunity to have their say on an issue on which too much time and money have been wasted to get us to this point. I, therefore, urge the House to oppose the amendment.

8.00 pm

Mr Armstrong: As I have said before, I am a great believer in the old saying that all politics is local. I am in no doubt that change to local government arrangements in Northern Ireland is welcome and long overdue. As we move forward in the twenty-first century, new arrangements are required to equip us to face new challenges and opportunities.

At Consideration Stage, the Ulster Unionist Party tabled an amendment that fought to ensure that the new council boundaries would be “readily identifiable”, that they would

“reflect the identities and interests of local communities”

and that they would

“secure effective and convenient local government.”

However, the DUP and Sinn Féin opposed such measures, because they ran counter to the deal that those two parties have cooked up between them. Once again, they have done what they believe is good for

them rather than what is good for the people of Northern Ireland.

In view of the changes that are proposed in the shape of the DUP and Sinn Féin’s proposed 11-council model, the Ulster Unionist Party urges them —

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Armstrong: You will have piles of time to chat after I have finished. *[Laughter.]*

The Ulster Unionist Party urges the DUP and Sinn Féin to take the time to explain those changes to as wide a section of the electorate, and at as local a level, as possible.

Currently, 26 local councils cover Northern Ireland. The Ulster Unionist Party does not believe that it would be unreasonable for a public hearing to be held in each of the existing 26 local government areas to explain the changes that are being proposed for each of them. In that way, everyone would have the opportunity to attend a meeting in his or her council area rather than have to travel further afield. The constituents in Mid Ulster are parochial; they do not want to move too far from their council areas. Such a step would help to minimise the confusion that may occur with new boundaries. In view of the proposed widespread changes and the long-term consequences that they will have, that is not too much to ask.

Mr Weir: As did a Member who spoke previously, I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. I am also vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

I will surprise the proposer of the amendment by saying that I agree with him on two points. I will also make a confession. I agree with the Member —

Mr Storey: You were once a member of the Ulster Unionist Party. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: My secret past has been uncovered.

I agree with the proposer of the amendment, who said that it was essential that there be widespread consultation. He also said that it was right to listen to the voices of experienced councillors. I agree with him on both those points. Indeed, that is why I oppose his amendment.

I now come to my confession. On several occasions, the Member has expressed grave concern about the vast journey that is to be made between Carrickfergus and Ballymena, and that it is some insuperable barrier to proper consultation. I confess that, several years ago, I mounted an expedition between those two vast places. As with any expedition, plenty of preparation had to be done. I needed to ensure that we had the correct crampons, because we had to cover that treacherous terrain of the Antrim plateau. I also had to hire local Sherpas to help us make such a treacherous journey.

I must confess — in substance to the point that Mr Beggs raised — that, during the journey, several of my companions got lost on the way. On day 37 of the trek, some disappeared down a crevice somewhere along the Antrim plateau. Fatigue and exposure proved too much for others in the end and, several months into the journey, they had to give up.

As food supplies dwindled, some on the vast journey unfortunately starved to death. However, a brave few eventually made it to the end and showed that the great journey between Carrickfergus and Ballymena could be made. I have confidence that if those brave, intrepid people can cross the vast distance between Carrickfergus and Ballymena, fired by the sheer passion that exists in Carrickfergus and Larne — and other parts of the country — about where their local government boundaries lie, others may yet emulate my trek and go a few miles to a local hearing. They might even risk writing something down on paper, putting it in an envelope, addressing it and putting a stamp on it because that is what we are talking about. It is a question of travelling a short distance.

I am shocked to find myself in agreement with the leader of the Alliance Party; a special anoraks' club is being formed around the issue. The principal problem with the amendment is that it is unduly prescriptive. There is much merit in bringing the wisdom and experience of local councillors to bear on the issue. However, why restrict consultation to the 26 councils; why create an impression that consultation is restricted to councillors? At present, the legislation provides for public consultation that will ensure that not merely councils and councillors are consulted but that everyone has an opportunity to express their opinion. I suspect that the important issues that will face any boundaries commissioner will be where to draw the boundaries of wards and the boundaries between council areas, when the key people concerned may be the residents of towns and villages adjacent to one another on either side of a boundary.

The leader of the Alliance Party made the point that although the Bill provides for a minimum of 11 public hearings, it does not say that there can be no additional hearings. I have heard arguments about whether Castlederg should look north or whether it is better suited as part of the Omagh and Fermanagh area. Surely, it would make sense for any boundaries commissioner to hold a hearing in Castlederg to consult more acutely in areas in which there may be controversy. In North Down and Ards I suspect that the discussions held by any boundaries commissioner will not centre on the ward boundaries of Conlig, as the leader of the Alliance Party seemed to suggest. In considering where the boundaries should be, I suspect that there will be an argument for people around Saintfield and Killyleagh about whether they look towards Ards or whether they

look southwards. A boundaries commissioner should be flexible and consider what level of consultation he or she can have in that area to ensure that —

Mr Ford: I am grateful for, if slightly embarrassed by, the Member's agreement with some of the points that I made. Does he not agree with me that there is traditionally a certain inflexibility when the boundaries commissioners operate and that there tends to be the minimum number of hearings? For example, in the last round of consultation there were only seven public hearings, despite the size of the areas covered by the so-called super-councils. There is a need to ensure, if the Member follows through his argument, that the commissioner — whoever she or he may be — is given a strong hint that they should consider having more than only 11 hearings.

Mr Weir: I share the Member's embarrassment at the convergence of our views. It is important that a clear signal is sent to the boundaries commissioner that their key job should be to examine the issues much more flexibly to get the boundaries right. That means that, particularly regarding the boundaries between councils, greater emphasis should be placed on the views of and consultation with communities and representatives in what might be described as boundary areas. There is an opportunity for such flexibility. The problem with the amendment, as has been indicated by the Member and by others, is that it removes flexibility, as it increases the focus on 26 particular areas rather than the areas that are perhaps most appropriate. For example, I have mentioned Saintfield and Castlederg.

The process must be focused, but the need for full consultation must be balanced by its cost-effectiveness. There may be a degree of local contention in, for example, the Saintfield or Castlederg areas. If the location of a public hearing were to be based purely on council areas, the inevitable pressure would be to hold the consultation for the Down District Council area in either Newcastle or Downpatrick, as they are the two main towns. However, the focus should, perhaps, be on Saintfield.

Similarly, if public hearings were to be restricted to one per council area, there would be a strong cry from the people of Strabane that it should be focused there. However, in practice, it would be much better to focus on Castlederg. A range of diverse communities live in a single council area.

I suspect that the boundaries of Belfast will present a key challenge to the commissioner, who will want to consult people from many areas in the city. The history of Belfast and the current boundaries between it and Castlereagh, Lisburn and, particularly, Newtownabbey must be considered. People from several areas may not be entirely comfortable with the selection of a single location, but the amendment allows for only one forum of discussion in the Belfast area.

The proposals are disproportionate and unduly prescriptive. Adequate flexibility has already been provided to facilitate the widespread consultation sought by the proposer of the amendment. Rather than imposing an artificial restriction of 26 council areas on the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, he or she must be allowed some freedom to manoeuvre. Therefore, I urge the House to oppose the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members who are not familiar with the great expedition from Carrickfergus to Ballymena will be delighted that there were survivors to tell the story.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Weir: If some Members were to re-enact the journey for a charitable cause in the near future, some good would come from the debate. Perhaps the distressed people of Carrickfergus could be that charitable cause.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I listened carefully, and with interest, to Mr Beggs, who moved the amendment, and to the subsequent debate. I noted that he spoke of “constructive” amendments. I trust that he would agree that it is not particularly constructive to determine the gender of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner before an appointment has been made. It came as no surprise to me that such a determination came from Mr Beggs, because that is how life is in the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister advise the House what terminology was used in the legislation that she introduced?

The Minister of the Environment: In case the Member does not know, the original legislation is from 1972. However, Mr Beggs tabled an amendment in the House today that is not gender neutral. Shame on him — not me.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of the Environment: The amendment falls into two parts.

Mr Ford: Embarrassing though it is, I agree with Mr Beggs. In the Minister’s legislation, clause 2(3)(b) states that paragraph 6(2)(b) should be substituted with: “that he will in due course”.

The Minister of the Environment: That reference to “he” exists because the legislation that I introduced revokes the 1972 legislation.

The first part of the amendment introduces a provision for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to consult with all 26 councils. The second part seeks to change the commissioner’s announcement on public hearings, with the effect that hearings would be held in each of the 26 local government districts rather than in the 11 new districts. Why is it necessary for the

commissioner to announce something that already happens as a matter of course?

The provision in the Bill, as it stands, is sufficiently flexible to support the commissioner in conducting public hearings on the provisional recommendations of the review.

Public hearings in each of the 26 existing local government districts are not necessary, for several reasons, including the one highlighted by Mr Alex Maskey relating to the current agreement between the 26 areas.

8.15 pm

That leads me to believe that, as with other amendments tabled by Ulster Unionist Members, this one is obstructive rather than constructive. It is aimed at delaying the work of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. Ultimately, the commissioner will decide how many hearings he or she may hold — as many as are necessary. The legislation is not prescriptive, which should have been taken into account when the amendment was placed before the House.

The configuration of the 11 new local government districts is based on the amalgamation of the whole or major parts of existing local government districts. The proposed boundaries of a new local government district will be a matter of common interest for all of the existing districts falling within that area. Holding public hearings in each of the 26 existing districts would take no account of those developing relationships and would not bring together the relevant parties to discuss these matters of common interest. On the other hand, public hearings in the new local government districts will allow for bilateral or multilateral discussions that do not reinforce old structures at the expense of the new.

I also wonder about the effectiveness of a public hearing within one of the existing 26 local government districts when that district is to be divided across two or more new districts. The requirement that the commissioner must hold public hearings in each of the proposed new districts will enable him or her to hear views from the people most affected by the proposed boundary change, regardless of their present council district.

Cost is also an important factor in opting for 26 public hearings rather than 11, especially where the main population centres for existing districts are relatively close together. For example, one of the new local government districts will comprise the whole or major parts of the Ards and north Down districts. The towns of Bangor and Newtownards lie less than 10 miles apart, and we have already heard from Mr Ian McCrea about Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt.

Mr Ian McCrea raised the issue of cost. When the review of local government boundaries on the seven-council model was carried out, the cost associated with public hearings was £60,000. Seven assistant commissioners were appointed at an associated cost in the region of £23,000 to conduct public hearings in each

of the proposed districts. The amendment, if agreed, would lead to separate public hearings in Ards and in north Down on a matter of shared interest, and the cost-effectiveness of that must be questioned.

Of course, not all local government districts are as conveniently adjacent as Ards and north Down. I listened to Roy Beggs's east-of-the-Bann argument about journeying from Carrickfergus to Ballymena. I challenge him to make such an argument if he lived in the west of the country, where, for example, the headquarters of the Western Health and Social Services Trust is in Londonderry. That is something which those of us who live in Fermanagh have to accept, and Mr Beggs should consider that when he makes points about east of the Bann.

However, the existing procedure as outlined in paragraph 6(5) of schedule 4 to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, as amended, gives the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner scope for additional public hearings:

"to be held in such manner as he may direct."

That is a matter of discretion for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, but the scope for more than one hearing for each of the 11 government districts already has legislative support.

Mr Ford asked me to encourage the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to have other meetings. I am happy to tell the House that I will do so, if there is a genuine need to encourage the commissioner to look favourably on such a request. I will communicate that to the commissioner when he or she is appointed.

The first task for the new Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be to read Hansard records of debates in relation to this Bill, so that they can take on board all the points that have been made by Members, irrespective of their party allegiance.

I want to point out that public hearings, by their nature, are not restricted to people located within a certain district. Members of the public will be free to attend one, some, all, or none of the hearings on the provisional recommendations.

During earlier debates on this matter, there was some good-natured banter about so-called anoraks, as, indeed, there has been today. There has also been speculation on the collective term for a group of anoraks. It will be interesting to observe the effect of that, if any, on anorak sales when the public hearings take place in 2009.

I wish to point out that public hearings represent only one way to respond to the commissioner on the provisional recommendations for district and ward boundaries. Notices will be placed in local newspapers, stating how and when written representations on the recommendations may be made. Consultation by electronic means will also be available. I accept Mr Beggs's point about people's putting their responses in writing. I recognise

that some members of society have difficulty in putting their thoughts on paper. Therefore, there are other ways of getting that information to the Department, which I am happy to consider.

For those reasons, I do not believe that the amendment would improve the Bill or add anything meaningful to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's task. The procedure for review or the effectiveness of the consultation process is outlined in the Bill and schedule 4 to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. I therefore urge Members to oppose the amendment.

Mr Kennedy: I declare my membership of Newry and Mourne District Council. The council's monthly meeting is being held tonight — they are missing me already. Indeed, I am also being missed at the other event that I might have attended had I not been in the House — the important visit of the Irish Chamber Orchestra, which is putting on a performance at Newry Town Hall. Members can rush for tickets after the debate.

The debate has been useful enough. Some of it has been predictable; some verging on mildly amusing. Much of it has been fairly straightforward. The case for the amendment was put adequately and eloquently by my colleague Roy Beggs. Whether the Assembly likes it or not, the changes that are being made in local government are far-reaching and wide-ranging. They will set the course for local government for the next generation. It is, therefore, important that the Assembly gets it right and that it allows and encourages as much public consultation to happen as possible throughout all parts of Northern Ireland. That is an important difference; the consultation must be seen to be wide-ranging and not just to occur in the usual places, with preordained decisions being made. All Members want the best possible outcome for local government. Let us get the boundaries right.

Existing local government — both the people who work in it and those who are served by it — is marked by considerable experience and knowledge that should be passed on to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, whoever he or she will be. It is worth remembering that one of the last reviews that was undertaken by a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner included not only council boundaries, but those of district electoral areas (DEAs) as well. The Minister has not yet indicated whether that will be the case in the next review.

The Minister of the Environment: District electoral areas are accepted to be part of the Secretary of State's remit. I have written to him and asked him to appoint a commissioner for district electoral areas in parallel with the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, so that the two can work in concert. The Member may recall the interchange that I had with Mr Ford on that matter.

Mr Kennedy: That in itself does not discount the possibility that those two posts could be filled by the same person.

There is a prospect that local boundaries could come down to streets and townlands in both urban and rural areas. That is important.

The message from the House, which I hope is united, should be that although the 11 new local government districts have been indicated — despite my party's preference for 15 council areas, which did not prevail — it must be ensured that the boundaries are flexible and that the boundaries commissioner will have the capacity, authority and common sense to change boundaries as he or she feels necessary.

Mr Alastair Ross toed the ministerial line and played the loyal Back-Bencher, a role for which I am sure he has earned the Minister's gratitude — we do not expect him to be in the same Lobby as us tonight. Likewise, Mr Alex Maskey played the important role of coalition partner — and we do not expect him to be in that Lobby tonight either. It appears to be a blissful marriage. However, describing it as one made in heaven might be stretching the notion slightly too far.

Mr Weir: Remarks made by the leader of the Alliance Party suggested that he too had problems with your amendment. Is it true that there are at least three in that relationship? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Kennedy: We will hear a little more about Mr Weir slightly later. In the meantime, I accept that Mr Ford gave us his sympathy, but, sadly, not his commitment. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Ian McCrea competed with Mr Ross for the honour of being the Minister's most loyal servant. I would give that accolade to Mr Ross — on points. I apologise to Mr McCrea, but Mr Ross put forward a slightly stronger argument.

My colleague Billy Armstrong provided an excellent reminder and thoughtful contribution. He recalled Tip O'Neill's famous comment that all politics is local. Therefore, it is important that local issues and concerns are developed and fully appreciated.

Following that, Mr Weir meandered his way through his speech in the same way —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members must make their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Weir meandered his way through his speech in the same way, presumably, that he made his imaginary journey from Carrick to Ballymena. It appears that Michael Palin's job is safe; I am sure he will keep making interesting travel programmes. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: I am sure that Mr Kennedy will agree that not even Michael Palin could complete a journey between Carrick and Ballymena in 80 days or less.

Mr Kennedy: As Michael Palin might say — this parrot is a dead parrot. *[Laughter.]*

During the Minister's contribution, she accused the Ulster Unionist Party of being disingenuous and badly behaved, which she is inclined to do on occasions such as this. I suppose there is now unrequited love between us. She mentioned cost implications, which are important and crucial factors to get right. There will be travel and cost implications, and not everyone will have the opportunity to use a ministerial car or be ferried from place to place.

The Minister of the Environment: Will the Member give way?

8.30 pm

Mr Kennedy: Allow me to finish the point. Not all of us have a ministerial car to ferry us about or, indeed, a decent mileage allowance to help us to undertake journeys. Therefore, consideration must be given to people who have to make what seem like relatively short journeys that are not always achieved for practical reasons.

Mr McNarry: The Minister will now make her car available to everyone as a shuttle.

The Minister of the Environment: I thought that Mr McNarry was going to tell me what he had said from a sedentary position earlier on, but I will have to wait until later to hear what that was.

Is Mr Kennedy suggesting that I use my ministerial car when I am working on issues in my constituency and going from Fermanagh to Londonderry, which is the length of the journey to which I referred when I was talking about the Western Health and Social Care Trust? If Mr Kennedy is suggesting that, he should be clear.

Mr Kennedy: If the Minister reads Hansard, she will find that I made no mention of the Minister to whom I was referring. If people want to think that I was referring to them, I draw my own conclusions.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to consider additional meetings as required. In line with the widespread agreement that consultation is good and important, and in the light of the fact that the Minister has indicated, if not promised, that additional hearings will take place, it appears that the Ulster Unionist Party amendment has been successful. It has raised the prospect that more than 11 hearings will take place, and that is important. People at local level will appreciate that.

Amendment negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Carer's Allowance Bill

Second Stage

Mr McNarry: As a result of positive discussions with the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Second Stage of the Carer's Allowance Bill will not be moved today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Second Stage of the Carer's Allowance Bill is not moved.

Adjourned at 8.33 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 12 May 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill

First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to introduce the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill [NIA 15/07], which is a Bill to provide for the licensing of operators of certain goods vehicles.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, under Standing Order 35(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any further amendments tabled to the Bill.

Two amendments have been tabled. Members will have received a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments, which provides details of the amendments. Amendment No 1 deals with arrangements for directing employees of the commission, and amendment No 2 deals with the appointment of a member as a chief commissioner. The amendments will be debated together.

I remind Members who intend to speak that they should address both the amendments. After the debate, I will put the Question on amendment No 1 and then ask that amendment No 2 be moved formally. The Question on amendment No 2 will be put without further debate.

Members are aware that certain matters relating to the appointment of the commissioners designate are before the High Court and are therefore sub judice. I encourage Members to bear in mind Standing Order 68. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Schedule 1 (The Schedule to the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as substituted)

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 4, line 2, at end insert

“6A. All employees of the Commission shall be subject to the direction of the Chief Commissioner, or if there is no Chief Commissioner, of a member nominated by the Commission.”

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 5, line 21, at end insert

“(6A) As from 1 August 2012 sub-paragraph (6) shall have effect with the substitution for head (b) of—

‘(b) shall designate a member as Chief Commissioner;’” — *[Mr Ford.]*

Members at this end of the Chamber are simply attempting to address some of the deficiencies that we perceive to be in the Bill as it stands after amendments were made to it at Consideration Stage.

The two amendments are tabled for different reasons. Amendment No 1 was not selected at Consideration Stage because of the technical order in which the amendments were presented, so we are presenting it again. Amendment No 2 is necessary to improve on, and tidy up, the pantechicon amendment No 8 tabled last week by the junior Minister Mr Donaldson.

During Consideration Stage, we made it clear that greater coherence and central direction is required in the workings of the victims' commission than that currently provided by the effective appointment of four commissioners. Each commissioner will have a veto over key aspects of the commission's work, which sends out the wrong message: that there is a divisive and apartheid system rather than a single, united and coherent one. A key aspect in obtaining greater coherence and central direction is ensuring that the commission's staff work as a whole instead of being divided and relating to one commissioner or to one group of victims. That is the approach that seemed to be suggested from the Sinn Féin Benches, particularly by Mr Molloy, in the debate last week, and we fundamentally oppose it.

We want to ensure that the commission operates as a whole, recognises the common interests of all victims and seeks to meet their needs. Victims' groups should not be carved up among the commissioners and perhaps treated in different ways. An example of the approach that we advocate can be seen in the work of Bertha McDougall when she was the Interim Victims' Commissioner. Undoubtedly, Mrs McDougall's appointment by Mr Hain was tainted — in fact, it was illegal. However, that did not affect her ability to relate to victims and victims' groups across society and from all backgrounds. Her background did not prevent her from relating to people from different sections of society. That is an example of how the commission can work as a whole.

My party has said on record that any of the four commissioners designate could do the job, which is an opinion that has not changed. The Alliance Party remains opposed to a commission of four, but the House has stated its opinion on that issue. However, a commission of four must be a single commission that happens to have four members, instead of four individuals who are expected to work in different directions, relate to the public differently, take a different approach and say different things in public interviews, which are all inherent dangers in the current structures. Most damaging would be the suggestion that staff members should have responsibility for dealing with one particular sector or group of victims. That must be avoided, which is why there is simple direction set out in amendment No 1:

“6A. All employees of the Commission shall be subject to the direction of the Chief Commissioner, or if there is no Chief Commissioner, of a member nominated by the Commission.”

That is the only way to ensure a coherent and single approach. It is unfortunate that, due to the technicalities of the ordering process, amendment No 1 was not selected last week. However, it merits thorough discussion and inclusion at this stage of the Bill's progress.

Amendment No 2 follows up some of the points that were made last week by Mr Donaldson — who, unfortunately, is not in the Chamber — when he tabled amendment No 8. Amendment No 2 seeks to ensure that the common direction that I have referred to applies across the commission through the existence of a chief commissioner. For the benefit of Members who did not hear the debate last week, the appointment of a chief commissioner would not create a hierarchy of victims — it does not, it is not intended to and it would not. Amendment No 2 takes account of the points that Mr Donaldson made when he spoke of the possibility of a chief commissioner and a group of part-time commissioners, which would be sensible. It makes the simple statement that, for the commission to function properly, there must be a chief commissioner for future commissions appointed after 1 August 2012.

The current process largely follows on from the flawed way in which the First Minister and deputy first Minister at first failed to appoint a commissioner and then announced the appointment of four commissioners when there was no legal basis for doing so. If that problem is resolved at this stage, it would be a clear statement that there is no reason why the requirement for a chief commissioner should not be put into place for a second and subsequent commissions following this commission's four-year term.

I am not entirely convinced of the bona fides of the two parties that are leading this Executive in this matter. That is why it is essential that the legislation contains a specific requirement — not a vague aspiration, as expressed by Mr Donaldson last week — for a chief commissioner for second and subsequent commissions. There must be serious forward movement in bringing together a single, coherent view in the commission. If, at this stage, there is a danger that the four commissioners could proceed in different ways, it is important that that danger be avoided and that such problems should not exist in any future commission.

The difficulty is that during Consideration Stage, amendment No 8 was a pantechinon that covered every possibility and made it difficult to debate the internal details of the amendment. The Alliance Party and the SDLP believe that amendment No 1 today, which amends a small part of the provisions of amendment No 8 as it was put last week, would create a more workable Bill. I doubt whether any amendment, however modest, will be passed, and I suspect that by the end of today we may well be congratulating Ms Ní Chuilín for the way in which she has enforced her Whip on DUP Members as well as on those of her own party. However, Members on these Benches believe that there are issues that need to be tested.

Mr Spratt: It is with a feeling of déjà vu that I oppose the amendments tabled by SDLP and Alliance Members. I feel a bit like Bill Murray in the film

‘Groundhog Day’ — I have been through all his before. However, it is the democratic right of Members to table amendments. The arguments put forward last week in relation to the provision of a chief commissioner still stand. The DUP will be opposing both amendments because we believe that the commission for victims and survivors as it stands provides the necessary flexibility to deal with the issue of having a chief commissioner in the future. That flexibility should exist, and the amendment tabled at Consideration Stage by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) provided for that.

I reiterate my desire to see an effective commission, and believe that a mechanism already exists by which a chief commissioner can be appointed in the future.

The commissioner for victims and survivors as it stands is an effective model by which the needs of victims can be met. If it were not so, the DUP would not be supporting its formation. We have a duty to the victims of our country to deliver where they have previously been ignored. I urge Members to unite behind the Bill, to recognise its potential for good and to give it the support it deserves. I oppose the amendments.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I oppose amendment Nos 1 and 2. We have reached an important stage of the Bill, through accelerated passage, and its provisions now need to be put into place. Today’s amendments do not add anything to the Bill because they are an attempt to pre-empt what might happen in the future. That is not necessary. I have not found in Mr Ford’s explanation, or in anyone else’s, any real reason why a chief commissioner is necessary; why someone should direct the other commissioners, and why there must be someone to tell employees of the commission what to do in particular circumstances.

We are employing people who are very capable of doing the job. We also want to involve as much as possible the families of victims and survivors when determining how to move this matter forward. It is very important that, at this stage, the process is victim-led rather than resulting from a diktat or from legislation that leaves the victims out. The legislation must allow some flexibility and give the commission the legislative footing that it needs to deal with the issues faced by victims and their families. That is the main issue.

I ask Members to oppose amendment Nos 1 and 2 and to let the commission get on with its work. I hope that a flexible approach can be adopted and that victims and survivors and their families can play a role in designing the future strategy for victims. Go raibh maith agat.

12.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: On behalf of my party, I support the amendments. I do so in the full expectation that — yet again — OFMDFM will pay no heed whatsoever to the views expressed in the House. One assumed that the Department would have taken care to listen to the House and to respond positively to at least a few of the many proposed amendments to the Bill. However, sadly, we witnessed the glib and arrogant dismissal of every single amendment that Members brought forward.

It is helpful to reflect briefly on some of the very reasonable amendments that have been dismissed thus far. The number of commissioners will not be capped at four. There is to be no chief commissioner; nor will there be prohibition on commissioners or staff members who have conflict-related criminal convictions. Each of the amendments sought to improve the working of the commission, and each was dismissed by OFMDFM.

Of course, last week, we witnessed the spectacle of members of junior Minister Donaldson’s party — and I am sorry that he is not here today — taking some time to lecture the House on the need to avoid the terminology of conflict-related convictions. Mr Spratt, who is present today, said that that matter refers:

“only to people who have been convicted of crimes that are related to the Troubles, and not to paedophiles” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p163, col 1*].

The junior Minister then went on to support Mr Spratt’s contention. Yet, that pressing need to prevent paedophiles from being employed by the commission seems to have been entirely absent from the junior Minister’s mind when the legislation was drafted. It seems that it took a four-week delay in the introduction of accelerated passage before the need to address the issue of criminal convictions entered the junior Minister’s mind.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member must address the two amendments that are before the House today.

Mr Spratt: The Member mentioned my contribution to last week’s debate. Does it not mean that everyone with any criminal conviction —

[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Now that the debate is back on the rails, let us keep it there.

Mr Spratt: I simply wanted clarification, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Kennedy: We should be at least partly grateful for the fact that junior Minister Donaldson and his colleagues have a unique interpretation of the meaning of accelerated passage.

Given what has happened in previous debates, most of us expect OFMDFM to dismiss automatically the two current amendments, not following consideration

of their merits, but simply because the present incumbents of OFMDFM appear to dislike scrutiny. The word “flexibility” was used often last week by the two major parties, the DUP/Sinn Féin coalition — the Axis — when talking about the Bill. Amendment No 1 provides flexibility, and provides OFMDFM with the flexibility to appoint a chief commissioner, if required.

Indeed, during last week’s debate on the Bill, junior Minister Donaldson said of one of OFMDFM’s amendments:

“we have made provision for the future appointment of a chief commissioner.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p125, col 1*].

That being so, amendment No 1 merely ensures that, regardless of whether a chief commissioner is in place, the commission will function effectively with one of the commissioners fulfilling the functions of a chief commissioner where employees are concerned. In the absence of such a provision, employees of the commission could — and would — be left in limbo. What is worse is that it is not difficult to envisage circumstances in which the potential and temptation would exist for employees to appear to be subject to the direction of particular commissioners, rather than to the commission as a corporate body.

Therefore, in addition to respecting the principle of flexibility, amendment No 1 also ensures, as much as is possible within the constraints of the Bill, that the commission functions as a corporate body rather than as a mere clearing house for four separate commissioners, which remains a considerable concern.

Amendment No 2 reflects the concerns of many in the House that the present DUP/Sinn Féin impasse over the need for a chief commissioner will have to be resolved at some stage. Obviously, the four-week delay in accelerated passage was not enough time to allow that resolution. Hopefully, therefore, amendment No 2’s provision allowing four years might assist the present OFMDFM incumbents to resolve their dilemmas.

During last week’s debate, junior Minister Donaldson indicated on several occasions that the OFMDFM amendment, which has since been incorporated into the Bill, provides that, at any time:

“The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly... may designate a member as chief commissioner.”

It appears that only one party in the House, Sinn Féin, which is the party of junior Minister Kelly, is opposed to the concept of a chief commissioner. I assume that I am right in saying that every other party in the House supports that concept. That being so, why does junior Minister Kelly not accept this amendment? Let him tell the House, now that he has the opportunity, the reasons that he and his party are opposed to the appointment of a chief commissioner.

Mr Donaldson has already stated that the OFMDFM amendments to the Bill:

“represent a consensus in OFMDFM, and there is agreement on how those issues should be addressed.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p139, col 2*].

Surely it is not too much to ask that the junior Ministers, over the next few weeks, can ensure the early appointment of a chief commissioner.

Amendment Nos 1 and 2 seek to improve the Bill, and as is the normal course of parliamentary procedure, I commend them both to the House. Indeed, more in hope than in expectation, I trust that they will be considered on their merits.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Shannon: It was only last week that we sat in the Chamber and discussed the details of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, and here we are doing the same thing again. Some Members are, perhaps, changing and posturing as much as possible, but my party and I will not do that.

The DUP has changed neither its mind nor its position since last week. We have, then as now, the victims’ best interests at heart. The Bill provides the framework for good and proper delivery of the help and support to victims and survivors that has been withheld for so long. Therefore, we will reject the amendments, allowing the Bill to stand as it is.

I was misquoted last week as saying that this was not the place to discuss this issue. I did not say that, and I checked the Hansard report to make sure. I said:

“Some Members wish to use this issue as a point-scoring exercise. I urge those Members to make their points elsewhere.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p121, col 2*].

I was not saying, as was suggested, that arguments should be made elsewhere; I was saying that those who were on a soapbox to make points should realise that the Victims and Survivors Bill was not the forum for getting one up on a political opponent.

During the many hours of debate on the matter, I have listened carefully to Members’ contributions, and I remained unconvinced that many of the amendments would make a positive difference to the lives of those who I am seeking to help.

Mr McNarry: Mr Deputy Speaker, as you properly took the time to remind Mr Kennedy of the importance of sticking to the motion, could I perhaps ask that consistency be applied in the debate?

Mr Shannon: I will bear that in mind, but I had to clarify last week’s misconception. If the amendments had added to the Bill’s protections or enhanced it, the DUP would have supported them. Instead, we were subjected to a great deal of posturing and pointless arguing. Nothing would have induced me to believe that any real point was being made, other than the fact

that some Members believe that the DUP is simply out to flex its muscles. Let us make it clear —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members to keep to the subject under discussion.

Mr Shannon: I thought that I was keeping to the subject; that is, the debate on the Bill.

Some £36 million has been allocated to victims. That is more than double the budgetary allocation awarded to victims under previous devolved Governments. I, too, want to ensure that as much money as possible is directed to front-line services. Therefore, I want to prevent the future expense of further changes to the legislation to allow for part-time commissioners.

Dr Farry: The Member cites the importance of directing as much money as possible to front-line services. Surely that is an argument for having one commissioner rather than four or potentially more.

Mr Shannon: The matter has been debated well today, and we have made our point clear. There is no sensible need to restrict the number of commissioners, when common sense will show that there will never be as many as 10 full-time commissioners, as some Members have suggested.

Amendment No 1 was not, and is not, necessary, nor is there any need for the compulsory addition of a chief commissioner at this stage. Therefore, the DUP also rejects amendment No 2. It is clear that some people have an axe to grind and are determined to do so.

Mr Ford: The Member told us why he rejects both amendments, but will he explain why, five weeks ago, members of his party told not only us but the media that they agreed with the substance of the amendments?

Mr Shannon: I cannot speak for the party, but I can say that the Member misquotes us. Our stance on the matter last week was clear, and our stance today is clear. Members of the Alliance Party should consult Hansard to find out what was said. Some people clearly have an axe to grind, and they are determined to do so, regardless of the issue.

I have no point to prove and no axe to grind. It is simply my duty as an elected representative, and as a concerned individual, to secure the best deal possible, as soon as possible. That is also my party's duty. That is what we have done, and will continue to do, for the people of the Province. I reject the amendments.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, oppose the amendments. Neither amendment adds anything to the Bill, which is about implementing legislation that will put a victims' commission in place, so that the issue of victims and survivors of the conflict can become the central focus. Nothing that I have heard in today's debate or in previous weeks' debates has changed my mind.

The commission will ensure that the structure needed to address victims' various needs is established. We must focus on the needs of victims and survivors, and allow the commission to get on with its all-important work, rather than raising barriers to prevent it from doing so.

Nothing will happen with the £36 million of funding and if we continue to stall the Bill by tabling amendments to it. The funding will not be released directly to victims and survivors. Therefore, it is very important for Members — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. One matter on which we can all agree is the fact that Members should address their remarks through the Chair.

Mr McNarry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Member take this opportunity to qualify her remarks and to introduce her opinion on democracy in debates?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Ford: The Member talks about delay. Will she remind the House who twice failed to move the Bill's Consideration Stage? As I recall, it was no one from the SDLP, the Ulster Unionist Party or the Alliance Party. If there has been any delay, it appears to have come entirely from her party and from her colleagues opposite.

12.30 pm

Ms J McCann: I have listened intently to the debate and the Alliance Party's amendments — among others — are stalling the Bill.

Groups and organisations that, for years, have dealt with victims' needs have accumulated a wealth of skills and expertise. The Assembly must release funding to allow those groups to continue and to develop community-based initiatives, which, throughout the years, have helped many victims and survivors.

Such progress is being stalled by the amendments. I urge Members to adopt a united stand, demonstrate strong leadership and direction, and support the commission's important work for the future. Stalling the Bill is not in the interests of victims and survivors. Go raibh maith agat.

Dr Farry: The Member for West Belfast Ms McCann mentioned stalling. Nothing of the sort is happening in the Chamber — we are debating legislation in accordance with Standing Orders. Although it may be news to Sinn Féin, that is how a proper legislative body operates.

A Bill is subject to a First Stage and a Second Stage; then a Consideration Stage and a Further Consideration Stage are opportunities for Members to table amendments. Once those have been considered, the Bill reaches its Final Stage. No additional business days have been scheduled by the Alliance Party, the SDLP

or the Ulster Unionist Party to frustrate the passage of this Bill.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member acknowledge that, at this time last year, OFMDFM informed the House that a decision on the appointment of a commissioner would be taken before the summer recess in 2007?

Dr Farry: Absolutely. The Alliance Party has tabled the two amendments because of the crisis of confidence and the cynicism in Northern Ireland about the legislation and the proposed commission. It is important to establish safeguards to ensure that the process represents properly the interests of victims.

Had the First Minister and deputy First Minister last year outlined to the Chamber the benefits of a commission — compared with the appointment of a single commissioner — and, subsequently, proceeded with the consultation necessary to develop public policy in Northern Ireland, the credibility of the proposals would have been enhanced. However, the proposal for a commission was, clearly, an afterthought. It was a political fix to bypass the inability to agree on the appointment of a single commissioner, as outlined in the legislation.

However, for better or for worse — and for worse, in my opinion — the House decided to take that route, and, consequently, today we must try to improve that flawed legislation. Amendments must establish safeguards to ensure that a single, co-ordinated strategy for victims is applied consistently across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

There is fear that the proposed commission will lead to a Balkanisation of victims' needs. As the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the UUP have on many occasions stressed, that is not a reflection on any of the individuals. It is a broader issue, concerning structures that will last beyond the tenure of the incumbents who will be appointed as commissioners in subsequent weeks. We must seize the opportunity to get this right.

In all commissions, staff are responsible to a single individual. That is the logical method of operation. It is not about hierarchy; rather, it concerns ensuring consistency in public body administration. In particular, I do not need to remind Members of the crucial importance of such a system when public funds are at stake. Although the matter could be incorporated into Standing Orders, there is, frankly, no community confidence that that will happen. Therefore, it is imperative that the legislation ensures that it happens.

The same circumstances apply to the appointment of a chief commissioner. The current draft of the legislation, as amended last week, provides for the possibility of the appointment of a chief commissioner. The public's perception of the present situation is that, although four parties support the idea of a chief

commissioner, that was vetoed by Sinn Féin, and a compromise was cobbled together by OFMDFM.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member accept that that is also democracy? Will he repeat his stated opinion that any one of the four commissioners is capable of doing the job? Will he explain why the four commissioners need a schoolmaster to look after them?

Dr Farry: I am hardly a schoolmaster. I accept that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is entitled to put such compromises before the House, although some might call them fudges. The Member's party, however, seems to have difficulty in accepting the right of Members of other parties to table amendments in order to fix flawed compromises and fudges. Notwithstanding the integrity of the four individuals who have, unfortunately, been brought into the equation because the cart has been put before the horse, it is important that proper accountable structures be established to deal with staff matters, not least when public funds are being used. That should be clear to all Members.

The importance of the proper use of public funds is the subject of regular discussion in the House. Four parties have publicly stated their support for a chief commissioner. One party used its veto, and the resulting fudge has been carried through into the legislation. A Sinn Féin veto has been written into the legislation. The appointment of a chief commissioner is no closer than it was before the OFMDFM amendment was made. All that we have done is cover up the cracks by suggesting that there might be a chief commissioner, but that that would require the agreement of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. If Sinn Féin is opposed to the appointment of a chief commissioner, it will veto such an appointment today or some time in future.

It is critical that the Assembly now agrees amendment No 2 in order to ensure that a chief commissioner shall be appointed and that the issue is not fudged. It is important that the legislation be coherent. It is already a botched job; it is already flawed. Let us not make it worse. This is our last opportunity to make some final corrections and to ensure that there is some consistency and credibility. There must be a single coherent approach to dealing with victims across Northern Ireland. We must avoid the Balkanisation of the crucial issue of dealing with victims.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I do not intend to address every contribution to the debate. However, a couple of words have been thrown about, such as "apartheid", which was used by David Ford, and another in-word, "Balkanisation", which seems to come up during every debate in the House. Let us be clear: this is about an integrated approach; it is about

four co-equal commissioners doing the job together in an integrated fashion. The Alliance Party Members go on about integration all the time, but that is what OFMDFM's approach is all about. I find the use of the word "apartheid" offensive; the use of the word "Balkanisation" is complete nonsense. Mr Ford has misunderstood entirely OFMDFM's intentions on this matter.

Having said that, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I appreciate that all Members wish to ensure that the commission will be effective, and I share that view. However, today's amendments will not do anything to enhance the work or the functions of a commission for victims and survivors. The two amendments that were made were an attempt to deal with some of the issues that were raised. We were accused of not listening, but we listened very carefully. Danny Kennedy said that we ignored the debates — far from it; the amendments that we tabled showed that we listened to Members and took on many of their concerns.

During the Bill's Consideration Stage, my colleague junior Minister Donaldson emphasised that OFMDFM wanted to maintain a flexible approach to the structure of the commission.

The foundation of our approach to working with victims and survivors has been to place those most affected by conflict at the heart of defining needs, recommending strategies and structures, and advocating across Government and across society as a whole.

The commission that is described in this legislation is one part of that evolving structure. It is charged to convene a victims' and survivors' forum, which will be representative of victims and survivors and will inform the work of the commission. We wish to fully involve the victims and survivors of conflict in driving forward the process, and we must retain the ability to respond to their proposals and recommendations.

We have made provision to review the commission's working practices to ensure their adequacy and effectiveness. Therefore, we reasonably seek to retain the flexibility to respond to need, to ensure the effectiveness of the commission and to be informed by the views of victims and survivors themselves. We have taken that flexible approach because we would never presume that we know what is best for victims and survivors, nor would we prescribe the structures to meet their needs. The changing and evolving nature of the needs of victims and survivors means that the legislation must allow us to have the flexibility to respond to those needs. That is why we tabled our amendments. We have made the right arrangements to allow us to develop our future work with victims and survivors.

Amendment No 2 will create a situation in which we will be required to appoint a chief commissioner in four years' time regardless of the circumstances. I

noticed some paranoia in the UUP, SDLP and Alliance Party's attempts to impose that provision four years ahead. Those parties clearly believe that they will never hold the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and that is why they are trying to tie down the current office-holders.

Mr McNarry: Rubbish.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): That is what they are talking about. They have no faith in OFMDFM because they will never hold those positions.

No one would wish to be tied to such a decision. It would not be sensible —

Mr Elliott: I thank the junior Minister for giving way. Will he state for the record whether he classifies himself as a victim of the Troubles of the last 40 years?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): That is not relevant to this debate.

It would not be sensible to enshrine in legislation in 2008 a commitment to take a certain course of action in four years' time. That makes no sense whatsoever. We want to see how the current arrangements work, and, as I said, we have already made provision to be flexible in our approach to the evolving structures for victims and survivors and to their changing needs over time.

Mr McNarry: Your nose is growing longer, Gerry.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): There are a few Pinocchios in the Member's party — I can tell him that. At least he did not slag me about my chin. *[Laughter.]*

Amendment No 1 deals with reporting arrangements within the commission. It would be unwise to dictate in legislation the way in which reporting arrangements for commission staff will work. That is, rightly, an internal administrative matter, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I ask Members to reject the amendments for the reasons that I have given. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: My arms do not seem to be long enough to pick up my notes. *[Laughter.]*

It is clear that there are still diverging views on why these amendments are before the House today. Some Members argue about whether it is proper democracy. The answer is yes. That is what the Chamber is for. It is for progressing legislation — not that Members have often had the chance to do so, because there has not been much leadership in that regard. However, when we have had the opportunity to debate legislation, my party has proposed amendments in order to improve it.

Much play has been made of the necessity of moving this legislation forward. We agree with that — it was not the SDLP, the Ulster Unionist Party or the Alliance Party that failed to agree on a decision before the summer recess of 2007, at the beginning of

the new debating season in September, or shortly before Christmas.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member explain, therefore, why her party did not propose legislation to establish a victims' commission when it held the post of deputy First Minister?

12.45 pm

Mrs D Kelly: It is my understanding that it was the SDLP, alongside the Ulster Unionists, that instigated the strategy for victims and survivors, and first recognised — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must repeat the one rule on which we are all agreed: remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member tell the House who was appointed on that occasion?

Mrs D Kelly: That has nothing to do with this debate. I am happy to answer Mr Molloy's questions, in so far as the budget and the fund were set up for victims and survivors, in opposition to his party's views. The political instability over the past 10 years is certainly not something in which the SDLP had a hand.

It is a matter of regret and bad practice that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has not realised the necessity to bring all staff under the direction of a chief commissioner. It is vital to the interests of commission staff and the commissioners that there be strategic decision-making and planning to deliver a consistent high-quality service to victims.

A number of Members seem to think that one could employ all those people without giving them any clarity, responsibility or direction. That is not good employment practice by any stretch of the imagination, and it is something that amendment No 1 seeks to rectify.

My colleagues and I are pleased to support amendment Nos 1 and 2 in seeking to inject some coherence and cohesion into the commission, which has been born out of division and indecision. Amendment No 2 has been tabled in a spirit of optimism, moving on from the fiasco that has characterised the process thus far.

We propose, from 2012, a framework that is more consistent with the other commissions to which the junior Minister has compared the victims' commission. In response to junior Minister Kelly, one of the reasons that we want to get this right is so that, when we take over, the legislation is right.

There was originally to be the appointment of a single commissioner, so, whatever our misgivings, we are where we are. Having radically altered the commission's structure, we urge OFMDFM to accept logical and necessary changes and commit himself to the designation of a chief commissioner — if not for the current commission, for the next one.

Both Sinn Féin and the DUP failed to listen to our previous arguments, and we seem to be in the same situation today. It is interesting to note that, yet again, when debating the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, some DUP Members remain absent from the Chamber. It is a matter of public record that those Members made much public comment in support of the appointment of a chief commissioner. The media-services department of the House can provide those who challenge my comments with the evidence necessary to convince them of my argument.

There was much talk of Balkanisation and of a hierarchy of victims' commissioners. Clearly, as Mr Farry said, there is cynicism across the community as a result of Sinn Féin's and the DUP's inability to make a coherent decision. Amendment No 8 served to kick their stated positions into the long grass over the next four years: on one hand, Sinn Féin is continually opposed to the appointment of a chief commissioner, and, on the other, the DUP is clearly at some loss as to whether to support it or not. Much of the Back-Bench view, and the view of certain senior DUP party members, is that there should be a chief commissioner. That is the best way forward. Over the years we have heard the cry — particularly from Sinn Féin and the DUP — for their mandate and their views to be respected. That is all that we are asking for today.

I have spoken to victims' groups, and they champion the idea of a chief commissioner. It is strange that one party will not accede to a logical request from the victims' groups. I support the amendment.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 25; Noes 52.

AYES

Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Burnside, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Savage, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland,

*Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Miss McIlveen,
Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan,
Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton,
Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley
Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson,
Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon,
Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir,
Mr S Wilson.*

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr Brady.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 2 negatived.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

1.00 pm

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Final Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill [NIA 14/07] do now pass.

I do not intend to cover all the Bill's provisions in detail. The purpose of the Bill is to provide for the reorganisation of local government in Northern Ireland as part of the review of public administration.

Members will be aware that on 13 March, the Executive agreed that Northern Ireland would have 11 new local government districts based on an amalgamation of the existing 26 districts. That had been proposed and consulted upon as part of the review of public administration consultation document that was issued in March 2005. It is our objective that elections to the revised local government structures will be held in 2011.

The Bill sets out the broad boundaries of the 11 new local government districts with reference to the current 26 local government districts, and it provides for the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in 2008. The commissioner's task will be to review, and make recommendations concerning, the names and boundaries of the 11 new local government districts and the number, names and boundaries of the wards into which each district will be divided.

The prompt appointment of the commissioner and early commencement of the review will advance the reorganisation and modernisation of local government. Furthermore, it will go some way towards achieving the deadline of 2011 — a deadline that, I acknowledge, is challenging.

I thank Members and the Environment Committee for allowing the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage — although I acknowledge that that was not a unanimous decision. The debates at all Stages of the Bill's passage have been extensive. Members have had the opportunity in those debates to air a range of opinions, and discussion of the Bill has been thorough.

Some 19 amendments were proposed at the Consideration and Further Consideration Stages of the Bill. Although no amendments have been made to the Bill since its introduction, I thank Members for their careful consideration of the Bill and for their contributions to the debates on the merits and implications of the proposed amendments.

Subject to the Bill's being passed, I look forward to working with the Environment Committee and Members on subsequent Bills for developing and delivering a robust and vibrant system of local government. The

Bill is an essential step in the process of bringing local government arrangements into the twenty-first century.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá.

I support the Bill. The Bill is about delivering services to the public and being responsive to the public. Will the Minister assure the Assembly that the Bill, through the commissioner, will ensure fairness and equality for the public, no matter to which council area they will eventually belong? We must get on with the job of appointing a commissioner so that the time frame for the new councils can be met. I support the Bill. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Beggs: The Local Government (Boundaries) Bill is the most significant piece of legislation to pass through the Assembly since the restoration of devolution. It will shape local government for decades and affect most citizens in some way — as has been said many times over the past few weeks. It is, therefore, crucial that we achieve the best Bill possible.

Unfortunately, the Minister, backed by a DUP and Sinn Féin diktat, has pushed the Bill through the Assembly by way of the accelerated passage mechanism. The bypassing of the Committee Stage has prevented detailed evidence sessions and Committee scrutiny of the Bill, and, therefore, the Assembly's scrutiny of the Bill has been limited. It would have been useful to have had a Committee Stage so that Members who are not part of the Environment Committee could have read reports of the evidence and used it in our debates. However, that was not to be.

The Minister said that it was imperative that the Bill receive Royal Assent before the summer recess so that the elections could be held by 2011. However, it has been stated that, with the co-operation of the Committee, that goal could have been achieved without accelerated passage.

It is now mid-May, and as this session of the Assembly does not end until July, it would have been useful to have been able to use the additional weeks to enable a greater level of public scrutiny. However, the Minister chose to ignore that, just as she has chosen to ignore every opinion offered and every amendment tabled throughout the process.

I recognise that there are time constraints, but I do not understand why the Bill was not brought to the Assembly much earlier. Why did the DUP and Sinn Féin not recognise those constraints and ensure that the process occurred earlier? Had that happened, it would have allowed for the level of scrutiny that is normally available to Committees and to the Assembly.

The DUP and Sinn Féin have agreed a specific 11-council model that many Assembly Members consider to be an abstract compromise that does not reflect the identity and needs of people in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Unionist Party has always been a strong advocate of the 15-council model and, therefore, strongly supported the Alliance Party's amendment to the Bill that proposes such a model. However, because we are also pragmatists, we tried to improve the 11-council model by tabling amendments, but our efforts were curtailed.

It was for that reason that we attempted to increase the scope and powers of the Boundaries Commissioner to allow him or her more power to change the boundaries and to ensure that he or she would explicitly take the identities and affinities of local people into consideration. Every other party in the Assembly made some reference to the fact that the Bill needs to take more account of the identity and desires of local people. There was general agreement that the Bill would be improved if it were to incorporate such considerations, and the Ulster Unionist Party attempted to convince the Minister of that through its amendments. However, by wilfully refusing to consider any arguments, the Minister and her colleagues in the DUP and Sinn Féin have ensured that their particular 11-council model will come into existence, largely as agreed by them in isolation and beyond the gaze of the public or, for that matter, without any involvement by other political parties.

The Minister rejected the amendments that were tabled during Consideration Stage. In recognition of the fact that the Minister would not change the commissioner's remit, we attempted, last week, to improve the commissioner's democratic accountability by advocating that he or she consults widely with the 26 councils and holds public hearings in each of the existing council areas. We were trying to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland would have their voices heard during this vital period. Although the Minister has made some noises suggesting that she will recommend to the commissioner that he or she should carry out further consultations, she again rejected the amendments tabled by the UUP.

The Bill's passage has not been the Minister's or the Assembly's finest hour. Through its passage and through that of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, we are witnessing the mistreatment of parliamentary protocol and the stretching of Standing Orders to the limits of their interpretation. That has been done in order to save the DUP and Sinn Féin having to consider any detailed evidence about, or Committee scrutiny of, their diktat, or having to face any movement away from their carved-up compromises. That is not good for devolution or democracy, and I urge the Minister and the two main parties to resist from taking this direction again. If this were another place, the way that the Minister has treated this Bill and this Assembly

could easily be considered to be an insult to parliamentary protocol.

However, the fact remains that the passage of the Bill is reaching its conclusion, and the Ulster Unionist Party recognises that a commissioner is likely to begin his or her work soon. We wish that person all the best in their work, and urge them to use every means possible — within the restrictive legislative process in which they must work — to ensure that local government boundaries authentically reflect local identities, rather than following an abstract prescription that has been dictated to him or her in the Bill that has been presented to the Assembly. We will continue to oppose the motion.

1.15 pm

Dr Farry: We are discussing a flawed Bill, and that is regrettable, because it means that a major opportunity to put local government on a strong footing for the future is being missed.

As Mr Beggs stated, there have been problems with the passage of the Bill. The House, and, I fear, the people of Northern Ireland, have yet again been the victims of the inability of the Executive parties to agree on critical issues in a timely manner. As a consequence of the delays that the Executive created when drawing up their final proposals, the ability of the Assembly and the time that is available to it to scrutinise and debate the matter properly have been curtailed severely. Accelerated passage was granted, which meant that there was no Committee Stage for the Bill.

None of the 19 amendments that several parties tabled in good faith was accepted. I fear that the adversarial nature of proceedings on the Floor does not readily lend itself to the proper discussion of what are, in many cases, technical amendments. In contrast, the atmosphere in Committee meetings may have allowed for much more detailed discussions between the different parties and for consensus on a sustainable way forward.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Member clarify whether the Committee for the Environment agreed to the accelerated passage of the Bill?

Dr Farry: It seems that members of the Executive parties voted in Committee for accelerated passage. There was, however, opposition to accelerated passage, including from my party leader.

It is important to note that Committees are not supposed to simply rubber-stamp the decisions that the Executive make; they are supposed to challenge those decisions. It is regrettable that not many Committees are fulfilling that important role.

Mr Weir: Does the Member accept that not only DUP and Sinn Féin Committee members voted for accelerated passage but that SDLP representatives did so?

Dr Farry: I do not speak for the SDLP; I am sure that its Members are more than capable of speaking for themselves. Indeed, I have no doubt that they will shortly take the opportunity to do so.

The sustainability of reforms is important. Members will be familiar with the litany of local government reforms that has occurred in England and Wales over the past 30 years and more. Many of those reforms had to be abandoned after several years. I fear that the same will happen to the 11-council model. That model has not been devised through a proper policy-making process in which the evidence would have led to a natural conclusion. Regrettably, the 11-council model was a political fudge; it was a compromise between the DUP and Sinn Féin.

As I said during the previous debate on the issue, I accept fully the rights of those parties, as Executive parties, to make such compromises. Equally, however, they must respect our right, as an opposition party, not to buy in to a flawed policy-making process. A move towards 15 councils would be more appropriate.

There is always a balance to be found between the size and scale of councils and their functions on the one hand, and, on the other, the closeness of their decision-making process to people and their interests, including the maintenance of civic identity and coherence of local government units. I fear that that balance has not been found.

The powers that have been transferred to local councils amount only to a move from approximately 4% of public expenditure to just over 5%, which does not represent a significant enhancement of powers. Perhaps the most significant move is the proposal to transfer community-planning responsibilities, which I welcome strongly. However, a move to 11 councils is not required to transfer those responsibilities.

I suggest that local authorities in Northern Ireland will soon have an average population size that is well out of line with those of any council in the British Isles and Europe.

In addition, councils in Northern Ireland have fewer powers than their counterparts in these islands and further afield. A much more extreme solution has been strived for than was needed.

Major questions have been asked about some proposed pairings, or groupings, of councils. Some mergers make sense, but others do not. In a number of cases, there will be significant local opposition — one such case being the proposed merger of Fermanagh District Council and Omagh District Council. Arrangements in the south Antrim area — where Ballymena Borough Council, Larne Borough Council and Carrickfergus Borough Council will merge, and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Antrim Borough Council will merge — are not logical, and will not be sustainable.

The proposed merger of Castlereagh Borough Council and Lisburn City Council has also raised many eyebrows. That proposal is not logical, if one takes into account how people lead their lives and access services, and that is regrettable. A system that uses a 15-council model as the centre point for devising new council areas would be a much more credible way of operating. It would allow natural communities to emerge; as opposed to a simple, quick-fix solution of grouping councils together. Although there may well be some revisions of the boundaries of the new districts, those will not be sufficient to address the system's underlying problems.

The workings of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner have also raised major concerns. Based on my recent experience of the process, the framework within which the new commissioner will make decisions is not sufficiently robust. The last report was flawed in a number of respects. A similar remit was given to the commissioner regarding the whole, or major, part of the districts that were grouped together. At that stage, only very minor amendments were made to the boundaries of the proposed seven super-councils, the only exception being Belfast. Even in the context of Belfast, there was major disquiet about the illogical outcome. The commissioner should be given more flexibility and be encouraged to think outside the box as regards those types of issues.

Belfast should be recognised as a major city region and a major growth dynamic in the regional economy. It would be logical to allow Belfast to expand its natural boundaries and allow Belfast City Council to take a more co-ordinated approach to what goes on in the city. That would ensure that the city reaches its full potential.

Such a process would also benefit Northern Ireland as a whole and the councils that border the Belfast area. That includes my own council in North Down, where there is a very close relationship with Belfast City Council. Both council areas would benefit from economic growth. An imperative has been missed regarding the natural layout of Belfast, and it has not been reflected properly in this legislation.

Many people have also mentioned the need to reflect local identity and social coherence when drawing up the wards. This process is not about drawing up artificial boundaries or creating class or religious divisions; it is about reflecting natural communities. It is not about breaking up townlands — unless that cannot be avoided — and it is not about breaking up villages.

This process is about trying, as far as possible, to keep towns within wards or within groupings of wards. It is about avoiding a situation in which unsightly wards are drawn up across huge swathes of countryside, touching upon the edges of different settlements. That would create issues about how credible district

electoral areas would subsequently be drawn up, and how credible local representation would be if it were based around those district electoral areas.

I was disappointed that more was not done in order to have a co-ordinated approach between the commissioner who is dealing with wards and districts, and the subsequent commissioner who will be dealing with district electoral areas thereafter. I appreciate that the process could be streamlined to a certain extent. However, it is critical that the first process should be connected to the second one. It should not be a case of the first commissioner tying the hands of the second commissioner; it should be about ensuring that the wards are drawn up so that they do not prejudice the process of drawing up district electoral areas thereafter, and that a situation does not exist in which wards areas extend across huge areas of countryside — or even towns — that make it more difficult to have district electoral areas that reflect natural communities.

We could find ourselves in a situation in which it will be impossible for a town or major settlement to lie within only one district electoral area. The fringe of one town could be lie within the district electoral area of another. We should, as far as possible, seek to avoid such situations.

I regret to say that my party believes that the process is flawed. We have missed opportunities to fix the already flawed process that has emerged from the Executive. The people of Northern Ireland will struggle with that situation in the future. The situation that must be addressed is not a flash in the pan that will last for five or 10 years; it could be with us for 30 to 40 years. It is critical to ensure that we get the process right at this stage, and I fear that we have not.

Mr B Wilson: My opposition to the Bill is not political or personal — although I am a member of North Down Borough Council — it arises from my previous life as a lecturer in government and the fact that the provisions of the Bill run contrary to many of the principles that are fundamental to local democracy. The Bill is fundamentally flawed. There are many different models of local government, but most have a common theme. The Bill's proposals ignore some of the basic principles for establishing efficient and effective local government.

The role of local councils is to provide local services for local people. Councils should be accessible, democratically accountable, and encourage participation in decision-making. They should also operate on the principle of subsidiarity, which states that matters ought to be handled by the lowest competent authority. The Bill appears to ignore all those principles and focuses solely on achieving a specific optimum population for each council area. The 11-council model will effectively

destroy local democracy, and the proposals will create maximum disruption and achieve minimum benefit.

First, we should recognise that it was not public concern about the delivery of council services that initiated the RPA. Indeed, the omnibus survey that was carried out for the RPA showed that there was strong public support for council services and that the public's concerns related mainly to centrally provided services, particularly health, education and housing. Those concerns include inaccessibility, the lack of responsiveness of direct rule ministers, the lack of political accountability and the proliferation of unelected quangos. The main demand from the public — and some politicians — was that traditional council services, centralised by the Macrory Report, should be made accountable and returned to local government. That demand has, to some extent, been met by the restoration of the Assembly. I question the methodology that was adopted by the RPA.

Mr A Maskey: I am curious as to whether the bulk of what the Member has said addresses the Bill, which does not deal with services and such like. We are dealing with the passage of a Bill that provides for the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

Mr B Wilson: The Bill is based on the findings of the RPA report. The structure and the methodology that have been adopted are totally unacceptable, because they do not deal with the main problems of local government. The Assembly is basing the 11-council model on the proposals of the RPA, and I am addressing the RPA, which is totally acceptable.

The RPA was unnecessarily complicated, overambitious, and ignored the fact that each service had unique problems in scale and timing. For example, there was no immediate issue facing local government, but the problems facing the Health Services were extensive and urgent. It is nonsense to lump all public services together and expect a single solution to resolve their problems.

The Health Service in particular needed urgent reform, and that reform could not be delayed until the functions and structures of local authorities had been resolved. That is now clear, because the RPA's main theme has been discarded, with major services such as health, education and policing deciding to go their own way.

1.30 pm

We should therefore ignore the models that the discredited RPA put forward. Instead, we should look anew at the role, structure and principles of local government, in particular its relationship with central Government. The whole RPA exercise seems to have been based on four false premises: that additional powers would be devolved to local councils; that there would be significant savings to the ratepayer; that services would be delivered more efficiently and

effectively; and that coterminosity would be central to the provision of effective services.

To put it bluntly, the RPA has failed to deliver any significant increase in local councils' responsibilities. They will not even have responsibility for libraries or the Youth Service. The main local services — health, education, housing and social services — will continue to be the responsibility of unelected quangos, and the percentage of public expenditure that local councils control will rise from 4% to 5%. An increase of 1% does not justify the disruption of thousands of staff and the massive relocation of estates, as model 11b requires. In fact, were the group system to be expanded slightly, nothing in the new powers that are proposed for councils could not be met by the existing councils.

In earlier legislative stages, Members highlighted the benefits of model 11b's introduction to ratepayers. However, they have provided no evidence to support those claims, and I suggest that no such evidence exists. Most local-authority expenditure goes on providing local services such as refuse collection, leisure services and building control. Those services will still have to be provided, regardless of which authority provides them, and that offers little opportunity to make savings. However, there will be a significant increase in costs due to redundancies, relocation and the upgrading of the estate. Similarly, the claim —

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mr B Wilson: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that, when they give way, they must resume their seat.

Mr P Robinson: How can the Member argue both sides at the same time? He says that no savings will be made yet goes on to say that there will be redundancies.

Mr B Wilson: There will be some higher-level redundancies, but the vast majority of staff employed in —

Mr P Robinson: Therefore, money will be saved.

Mr B Wilson: Yes, but my point is that those savings will not be significant. The vast majority of people employed by local councils provide a local service — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. All Members must make their remarks through the Chair. That applies to everyone.

Mr B Wilson: There will obviously be some redundancies, but the vast majority of employees who provide services to the local community will continue to provide them. There will, at a higher level, be some rationalisation of the chief officers' roles, but those savings will not be significant, and no one has provided any evidence to the contrary. We know that, if there are

redundancies — there will be — redundancy payments could be significant. Many millions of pounds were paid out in redundancy packages to senior Health Service officers. Considerable expenditure will also be involved as councils' relocate to new areas and new offices.

The claim that the new councils will provide more efficient and effective services cannot be proven. As I previously pointed out, recent research by Tony Travers into local-government reform in England indicated that there was no link between the size of a local authority and the efficiency of the service provided.

The coterminosity argument is even more dubious. Although the RPA suggested that coterminosity was the single most important factor in the review, I find that assertion rather strange, because coterminosity does not exist in the rest of the United Kingdom or, as far as I am aware, in any other European democracy. In fact, I suggest that coterminosity is not desirable, because the optimum population for the provision of different services will differ considerably, depending on the service. The fact that coterminosity has now been effectively discarded indicates that that has been recognised.

Members speaking in favour of 11 councils also argued that we have too many councils that are too small to reach the critical mass needed to provide services efficiently. That, however, is refuted by the experience of Scotland and Wales. In Wales there is an Assembly plus a single tier of local government, comprising 22 local authorities of which only one has a population of more than 250,000. In Wales, a third of local authorities have a population of less than 100,000 — the minimum population size proposed in the Bill for a Northern Ireland council. All 22 local authorities in Wales have full responsibility for a much wider range of local services than that proposed in the RPA.

In response to the RPA proposals for Northern Ireland, Professor Colin Knox has pointed out that the case for large, single tier local authorities is not grounded on experience elsewhere. Therefore, evidence from academics and people involved in local government discounts the premise that the 11-council model will achieve greater efficiency and savings.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is a convention and a Standing Order that require a Member's speech to relate to matters on the Order Paper. What is being said has nothing to do with the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. The Member is discussing the substance of the changes in local government under the RPA. The Member must address the issue under debate, not go off on some hobby horse of his own.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is reminded that he should stick to the subject.

Mr B Wilson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I considered that the emergence of the 11-council model

from the RPA was adequate justification for my making the points in question. All of the points — on efficiency savings and on more effective local government — have been made in previous debates by many Members who supported the Bill. I am refuting those claims because they are not supported by any evidence.

The 11 proposed new councils are designed to deliver the optimum population size as determined by bureaucrats as part of a number-crunching exercise. However, they totally ignore local identity, traditional boundaries and long-established communities. There is no optimum size for local authorities. Factors such as population, geography, identity and history must be considered in every case.

In adopting model 11b it is clear that the Executive accepted that a critical mass consisted of more than 100,000 and tried to maintain a population balance across the 11 proposed councils, an approach that totally ignores traditional boundaries and allegiances.

Had local identity been considered, 11 councils would not have been the model selected. Instead, the new councils would reflect local communities, which are significantly different from those proposed. Fermanagh could have been given its own council for a population of 60,000, and there could have been an expanded council for Belfast that took account of the conurbation with a population of, perhaps, 400,000.

Councils should not be kept within population sizes of 100,000 or 200,000. They can reflect local populations and traditions. There is no need to place a restriction on the numbers.

The example of other countries in these islands should be considered. In Wales, Cardiff Council serves a population six times bigger than that of the smallest council. In Scotland, the population of Glasgow City Council's area is 25 times that of the smallest council's. In England, Birmingham City Council's is 40 times that of the smallest council's.

Mr Weir: I want to be clear on the Green Party's position on the issue; will the Member clarify whether he is arguing for more than 11 councils — 15, or perhaps even 26?

Mr B Wilson: I am not arguing for either. I am saying that the principle for the 11-council model is based solely on numbers. The approach should be reviewed to take account of the most effective way of providing services for local communities that identify with a certain area. People who identify with Fermanagh should be able to provide services for Fermanagh.

In England, Scotland and Wales, councils range from the very small to the very large, in order to reflect the diversity and differences among local communities. Services are delivered in accordance with communities' needs and are not dictated by some central body. Councils

are not drawn up by a computer in an effort to ensure the optimum population for a particular service. Initially, they must reflect the local communities to which services are then appropriated.

Colin Knox maintains that recent amalgamations of councils in Great Britain lack shared identity. In certain places, councils that were created need to be reviewed because they do not reflect local identities. I envisage that that situation will arise in Northern Ireland in 10 years' time. Dr Farry has indicated that the failure of some of those councils in England could mean that the 11-council model must be re-examined in the not-too-distant future.

People have been distracted by the size of councils. As a result, local identities have been lost. For example, people do not identify with the Castlereagh/Lisburn "banana". The experience in England has been that, when larger councils have been created, there has been loss of identity. Turnout for local council elections was only 30%, because people do not identify with those councils. In Northern Ireland, the turnout is over 60%. Public participation in the political process must be encouraged. The introduction of larger councils that have no common identity will, inevitably, lead to loss of participation.

Another possibly minor matter is that many Members have served as mayors or chairpersons of particular local councils, each of which has a different identity. Certainly, mayors are invited to hundreds of engagements because people feel that they represent their local communities. Mayoral appointments are historic, and people identify with them. The new proposals will abolish certain positions, some of which have existed for 100 years or more. They will be replaced by new positions; for example, that of the new chairperson of the Castlereagh/Lisburn "bent banana". Will anyone identify with that appointment? The present structure provides accessibility, accountability and civic leadership. It encourages participation in local democracy and promotes a sense of local identity, which will largely be lost as a result of the Bill.

I regret that the Bill has been steamrollered through the Assembly. Certain amendments should have been made that would create flexibility and, perhaps, include the concept of local identity. I accept that reform of local government is needed. However, it is not urgent — it could be deferred until rationalisation of the Assembly, the Executive and the 11 Departments is carried out, which will impact on local government.

If the current proposals are accepted, local-government boundaries will need to be re-examined within the next 10 years. I do not support the proposals, because they will weaken local democracy and local identity; they will create massive disruption for councils' staff and estate for little obvious benefit; and they are

likely to cost, rather than save, money. At best, they are an irrelevance; at worst, a distraction from the political and economic problems that face Northern Ireland.

1.45 pm

Mr Weir: First, I, like the last two Members, declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. I am also vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).

I watched the 'Politics Show' yesterday, and a great injustice was done. Why Brian Wilson was not pronounced the greatest communicator in the Assembly — nor, indeed, politician of the year — is utterly beyond me.

I support the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill, which is what we are supposed to be discussing. However, it appears to have become the local government anoraks extension Bill. Membership of that club seems to be widening day by day as each debate takes place.

A number of criticisms have been levelled at the Bill, and I want to deal with some of those today. First, in relation to the use of accelerated passage for the Bill, the Member for East Antrim Mr Beggs said that, in another place, that would have been deemed unacceptable. Of course, in another place, as when we did not have devolution, we might have been given only an hour or an hour and a half to discuss an Order in Council, and we would not have been able to amend it.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member think that if a motion were to go through Westminster that affected local government in England and Wales, it would be put through in an hour or an hour and a half?

We are talking about Northern Ireland and how to deal with local government here; it is in our gift and power to determine the length of time for such consideration. Will the Member accept that were MPs in England and Wales determining the future boundaries of local government in that jurisdiction, considerably more time would be spent on ensuring that they got it right?

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his comments. If a local government Bill that established certain boundaries were to go through Westminster I suspect that a guillotine would be applied to it to limit the amount of time that it spent there. In contrast, this is the fourth occasion on which the substance of this Bill has been debated, as many of the Members who have had to listen to those debates will be all too painfully aware. Indeed, the speeches delivered in these debates have not been time-limited. The argument against accelerated passage would be slightly more worthy had any significant and worthwhile amendments to the Bill been proposed.

The Member said that the Committee Stage would have been the ideal opportunity to debate the Bill and produce a report that all Members of the Assembly could

have then read. Although I am sure that many Members are fascinated by my words and those of Mr Ford, Mr McGlone and others on the Committee, if Mr Beggs seriously believes that the House would be better informed by listening to the Environment Committee — as opposed to all 108 Members' having the opportunity to put forward their views on the subject — he is sadly mistaken.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: To be perfectly honest, I have heard enough from you for one day.

We must get the Bill through. Brian Wilson said that there was no time pressure and no reason why this should be happening. However, I remind the House that the original announcement about the RPA was delivered in 2000 at the Ulster Unionist Party conference. By the time this is put through —

Mr A Maginness: Were you there?

Mr Weir: I hear someone in a seated position asking whether I was there. On the afternoon in question, I was supporting our wee country at Windsor Park, which both at the time and with hindsight seemed a much more eminently sensible place to be.

Once the RPA, of which the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill is just one part, is completed in 2011, a child who was born on the day when it was first announced will have reached secondary-school age. I am at a loss to see how the Bill has been rushed. We must grasp the nettle, provide some degree of certainty and get on with the job ahead of us.

We were told that the Bill needed to deliver a degree of balance with the number of councils. That has been achieved in terms of size and scale. Of course, we must ensure that local communities have identities and that there is a level of accountability. However, we must also have the other side of the coin — and this has been sadly lacking in the discussion — which is to ensure that the proper economies of scale are in place to create a cost-effective model.

Down the years, I have received more complaints about rate bills and lack of value for money than I have about the accountability of local councils or their geographical basis.

The Bill tries to strike a balance on that basis. The opponents of the Bill do not appear to have provided a unanimous position on that. The majority of the Members who have expressed concerns want a 15-council model. Other Members, including Mr Brian Wilson, may want a 26-council model, a 60-council model or a 100-council model.

We are told that local community identification is the be-all and end-all, yet all Members could provide examples of areas in their constituencies which are one

or two streets apart but in which there is no connection between those communities. That does not mean that a plethora of committees and councils should be set up.

The issue of our being out of step with parts of Europe was raised. We are out of step with, for example, France, in which every village seems to have a mayor and a local council. Is that really the model that is being suggested? More than 1% of the population of France is a local councillor. That may be good for ensuring local accountability, but where is the effectiveness of delivery? Ultimately, that is what people care about most.

A range of weak amendments, which lack substance, have been proposed. The Alliance Party's amendment No 13 proposed that, at all costs, a townland should not be separated, unless that was unavoidable in the interests of maintaining social cohesion. However, if that were to be held as a hard-and-fast rule, a large area such as a golf club could fall into two different council areas and would pay different rates on parts of its land. There was not much sense in that amendment; Members who supported it said that there must be social cohesion, but they did not give a proper answer to how that would be brought about.

Amendment No 14 proposed that the Bill reflect local identities. I take exception to the comments from the Member for East Antrim Mr Beggs. He said that everyone acknowledged that there was a degree of deficiency in the Bill on that issue. On the contrary, the ability to reflect local identity is contained in the Bill by way of the process that will be carried out by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, who will be able to consult widely and take evidence from local communities. That flexibility is at the heart of the Bill, which is concerned to ensure that the boundaries for wards and particularly the council boundaries reflect the desire of people on the ground.

Many examples have been used in which a strong case can be argued for which side of the line a particular community will fall. That may be the issue of Saintfield and Killyleagh, that of the southern boundary between North Down and Ards, the question of which area Castlederg should belong to, or the much-discussed issues over the boundaries in Belfast. The Bill provides the full level of flexibility for those issues to be resolved. By contrast, the adoption of the amendments would have led to a blank map that would have been left to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to fill in, in whatever form he or she wanted. That would have meant a further period of uncertainty and delay, and the strong, effective local government that is sought by the Bill would not have been achieved.

I agree with the concept of consulting widely. During the debate on 6 May, the Alliance Party accepted the point that was made by the Minister that the Bill will lead to a consultation exercise in each of the 11 proposed

council areas but that the Bill does not restrict the number of consultation exercises to 11. There will be an opportunity for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to consult in much greater detail where he or she sees fit.

In contrast, proposals to, in effect, ring-fence the 26 existing local councils would have been wholly inappropriate. Indeed, although I hope and believe that local councillors will play a role in putting people's opinions to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, to ring-fence those councillors into a special place that would be above other members of the community would be the wrong way in which to proceed. The Bill can help local government to make progress.

As many Members said, under the review of public administration, much work must still be done on many substantial issues that will probably have a much greater impact on the future shape of local government than the anorakish, navel-gazing discussions that have taken place on the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill. However, those are debates for another day.

Had better amendments been tabled, Members would have been minded to support them. Unfortunately, the arguments that the Bill's opponents made demonstrate that submitting the legislation to more thorough consideration than accelerated passage would have been a complete waste of time. The Bill will enable the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to get on with the job, allowing the commissioner's office freedom to manoeuvre, and flexibility to reflect local concerns and needs. I look forward to the commissioner's achieving what everyone in the House desires — strong, effective and accountable local government. I support the Bill.

Mr Ford: My colleague Stephen Farry outlined the problem with the Bill, and, therefore, Members will be delighted to hear that I do not intend to speak at length.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Ford: As someone, as proclaimed by Peter Weir, with an anorak-wearing tendency, as well as being a member of the Committee for the Environment and Antrim Borough Council — he declares rapidly — I wish to comment specifically from the Committee's perspective about issues that Peter Weir raised about the Bill's accelerated passage.

The Bill is a classic example of legislation that does not follow proper formulation but which emerges in a hurry as a result of another deal, and the reason why accelerated passage has contributed to that must be examined.

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

The Taxis Bill's progress through the Assembly was an example of a Minister's willingness to engage with

the relevant Committee, and a Committee's willingness to engage with its Minister, in the course of which the Minister's officials played a full part. As a result, amendments were produced that, when first considered, might not have been perfectly crafted for an experienced lawyer such as Mr Weir, but which ended up being positive and constructive additions to the Bill.

Given the confrontational nature of debates in the Chamber compared with discussions around the Committee table, for Mr Weir to sit back — as he does now — having got to his feet to criticise the quality of the proposed amendments, he implies that some points that were made a few weeks ago when we debated the Bill's accelerated passage were right. Mr Weir appeared to acknowledge that, if only we had had his learned experience in Committee in order to improve other members' feeble ideas, better amendments might have produced a Bill that he, and even the Minister, might have found to be better. That matter must be addressed.

I welcome the Minister's indication that, in other circumstances, such as those that I mentioned, accelerated passage is not the best way in which to pass legislation, and this Bill is proof of that, as is the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. The confrontational nature of debate in the Chamber does not allow for the necessarily detailed working-out of proposed amendments. No matter how many anoraks were to be assembled in the Chamber, that could never be considered a substitute for a proper Committee Stage.

Some of Mr Weir's criticism of specific amendments appeared to omit the fact that some amendments — particularly on procedural matters — noted that certain actions would be desirable; nevertheless, he described them as if they were being rigidly laid down.

The Alliance Party considers the Bill to be deeply flawed for several reasons. First, the figure of 11 councils is somewhat doubtful and cannot be said to have achieved public confidence. The proposed groupings are not coherent or acceptable. Indeed, they conflict with other aspects of the model as presented elsewhere in the RPA.

Mr S Wilson: The Member said that public confidence has not been secured for the 11-council model. On what does he base his view that the public are deeply unhappy and are agitating for more than 11 councils?

2.00 pm

Mr Ford: The Member cannot tell the difference between the meaning of "not attained confidence" and "people are agitating". No model has attained public confidence, and there was no specific consultation on any particular model. As I said earlier, the single convincing argument for the 11-council model seems to be seven plus 15 divided by two equals 11. I have seen no evidence, from anyone in the Member's party or from Sinn Féin, of a better argument than that.

One does not have to join Mr Weir in his expeditions over the mountains of East Antrim — Shane's Hill in the wintertime — to know that Roy Beggs had a point when he said that, according to models 15b and 15c, local community ties would put Antrim with Ballymena and Newtownabbey with Larne and Carrickfergus. However, the grouping in 11b is different for those five councils. No other grouping has operated on that basis, so it should have been subjected to local tests with more, not less, flexibility given to the Boundary Commissioner. There is flexibility in the proposals — however, there should have been more.

Furthermore, the issue of coterminosity has been raised. It was clear that there was never going to be one-for-one coterminosity once the seven-council model had been rejected. As has been highlighted previously, the 11-council model makes one-to-two or one-to-three coterminosity, on issues such as health and social care trusts or policing, impossible. That we can manage no movement towards coterminosity is regrettable, because, at one stage during the discussions under direct rule, it was elevated as the only thing that mattered. The process will not be helped by that, and timetable pressures will combine to make difficulties.

I regret that reasoned amendments were not accepted, and that the only concession was — as Mr Weir has highlighted — the Minister's assurance in last week's debate on the number of boundary hearings. If that is the level of ministerial concession for Members to expect when Bills are discussed, it does not hold out great prospects if accelerated passage continues to be used. I am afraid that some of us still believe that the Bill is deeply flawed.

The Minister of the Environment: I thank Members for their contribution to the debate, particularly the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment who began the debate and said that he wanted me to say something about fairness and equality. Obviously, those two issues underlie all the work done on the reform of local government, and will become apparent when further Bills are brought before the Committee and the House.

Mr Beggs revisited arguments that he made during the Consideration Stage of the Bill. He spoke of an alliance between the two major parties to push the Bill through, which ignored the fact that, in the Environment Committee, we had gained the SDLP's support for accelerated passage. However, accuracy does not seem to be one of his strong points.

I want to have a Boundary Commissioner in place by the start of July so that the work can begin. Mr Beggs contradicted himself by saying that we did not need to rush things before welcoming the news that the Boundary Commissioner will soon start work — if the

Bill had not received accelerated passage, he or she would not be able to start work soon.

He also accused me of:

“wilfully refusing to consider any arguments”

and of ignoring his amendments. There is a difference between ignoring amendments and considering them, but finding them muddled and incoherent, as were the amendments from his party. I am surprised that the Member keeps flogging that particular dead horse. Moreover, he alleged that the DUP and Sinn Féin went into a darkened room to make the decision. He knows that the matter was debated in the Executive on 13 March 2008, and came to the House as quickly as possible. Many of the points that Mr Beggs made can, therefore, be dealt with quickly.

Dr Farry went over old ground. I am sorry that he does not accept that we have had a detailed debate on the matter, and I dispute that. I have been present in the House for an entire day of scrutiny of the Bill. I have not yet had the privilege of that experience with the Environment Committee, but I am sure that that is something to which I can look forward.

This process is not the end of the review of public administration as far as local government is concerned — it is an ongoing process, which will be continually reviewed. Brian Wilson said that this issue may have to be re-examined within 10 years. The workings of local government will be continually under scrutiny — the Executive should do that. That examination will be ongoing, instead of waiting for some 35 years to reform local government, which is what happened heretofore.

Points were raised about Fermanagh and Omagh, and how never the twain shall meet. That is despite the fact that Fermanagh and Omagh are together in housing, policing, education and health. I cannot see what the difficulties are in that respect. There were also some philosophically grand phrases about the need to allow communities to emerge naturally. That type of subjective nonsense does not help the debate, and I am surprised at Members for coming out with that.

In Government, we must deal with realities. I do not have the luxury of fantasy local government, unlike Brian Wilson or Dr Farry. We are trying to put in place a real, effective, deliverable, efficient local government structure. I believe that that will be achieved through the model that is being considered.

Brian Wilson then regaled Members with tales of Armageddon and how we could be seeing the end of local democracy as we know it.

Mr Weir: It is notable that the Green Party Member has given indications on two occasions that the death of local democracy is near. If local democracy is about to die, will the Green Party boycott the elections? The

Member has been challenged on that, and he seems reluctant to answer.

The Minister of the Environment: We will wait with bated breath to see whether the Green Party stands in the local government elections of 2011. I am sure that the electorate of North Down will be greatly worried about that. For clarity, I can inform Brian Wilson that I do not hold responsibility for health matters. He delivered a wide-ranging speech on health matters, and if he wishes to raise such issues in respect of the review of public administration, he should raise them with the appropriate Minister.

I wonder whether the Member read anything of the current local government review of public administration. He registered absolutely no recognition of the links that we are trying to develop through community planning. Is it the position of the Green Party in Northern Ireland that health and education should be provided by local government? That is an entirely different matter, and is something that no one else in this House has suggested.

Brian Wilson then provided his own unique understanding of redundancies — that they are significant, but not in respect of efficiencies. I find it bizarre to take lectures on turnout from the Member for North Down, when his voter turnout is not the same as some of which we in the west are very proud.

The functions that will transfer to local government currently account for an annual expenditure of £116 million, and involve around 1,070 staff. That represents a 25% increase in the budget of local government and an increase of almost 12% in respect of its staff complement. This is the start of a process — it is my intention that a review of the family of local government functions will be conducted 12 months after the new councils become operational, and periodically thereafter.

The Member is correct about one issue: the rationalisation of the devolved institutions will have a knock-on impact on local government. Mr Weir pointed out that the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill is just part of the process. Further Bills will be introduced in relation to the review of public administration. I have already indicated, as has been acknowledged by Mr Ford, that those will be considered by the Environment Committee. Accelerated passage was not my first choice. All other parts of local government reform will be subject to the normal procedure.

Mr Ford ended the debate by reiterating his points about accelerated passage. The good work that has been done on the Taxis Bill has come back to haunt me on many occasions throughout this debate, but I must say that that was a good job, well done.

One of the benefits of local government reform is that it will raise awareness of local government, and thereby help to address the apathy among the public,

which David Ford mentioned, and people's lack of knowledge about the debate on whether to have seven, 11 or 15 councils. I hope that these debates, and the debates to come, will help us to engage those apathetic voters who could not care less about local government.

Finally, I wish to make one correction to David Ford's speech. He said that the policing structures do not have to be coterminous with local government structures. One of the recommendations of the Patten Report was that the police units should be coterminous with local government boundaries. I have, therefore, written to the Policing Board to alert it to the findings of the Executive and to see what it intends to do on that issue.

Subject to the passing of the Bill, I look forward to bringing to the House the subordinate legislation that will give effect to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's recommendations. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill [NIA 14/07] do now pass.

Insolvency (Disqualification From Office: General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): I beg to move

That the Insolvency (Disqualification from Office: General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be affirmed.

Provisions exist in a number of pieces of Northern Ireland legislation that disqualify a person from holding certain offices and positions should he or she become bankrupt. Following the passing of the Enterprise Act 2002, a review of legislative provisions of that type that applied in Great Britain resulted in the making of The Enterprise Act 2002 (Disqualification from Office: General) Order 2006. The aim of the review was to reduce the stigma of bankruptcy by removing unnecessary or outdated restrictions resulting from bankruptcy, while ensuring that restrictions were in place for those found to be culpable and made subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order.

The equivalent of the Enterprise Act 2002 in Northern Ireland is The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, which amended the main piece of primary insolvency legislation, namely The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, and made it possible for my Department to apply to the High Court for a bankruptcy restrictions order.

A bankruptcy restrictions order would be applied for — or an undertaking accepted — in cases where evidence had emerged following investigation that a bankrupt had been irresponsible, reckless or otherwise culpable. A bankruptcy restrictions order imposes a number of insolvency-based restrictions on a bankrupt for a period of between two to 15 years. It continues in force after a bankrupt is discharged from bankruptcy. As an alternative, the Department can accept a bankruptcy restrictions undertaking from the same bankrupt, which will have the same legal effect. The 2005 Order also reduced the period after which most bankrupts are discharged from bankruptcy from three years to one year.

My Department invited other Departments to review existing bankruptcy disqualification provisions and legislation that were under their policy control. As a result of the review, four Departments identified bankruptcy provisions that they wished to have amended. The outcome has been that it has been possible in five cases to do away with bankruptcy as grounds for disqualification and substitute that the individual would be subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order. In the remaining seven cases, it was decided to retain the bankruptcy disqualification, while extending the disqualification to those subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order. In general, that was because the office or position could involve duties of a fiduciary nature.

2.15 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr P Maskey): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On 9 October 2007, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment considered proposals to amend disqualification provisions, which are contained in various pieces of legislation, that apply if an office holder becomes bankrupt. The Committee was content with the proposals, and, as the Minister outlined, five such provisions were amended. As a consequence, bankruptcy will no longer result in disqualification, and the office holder will be disqualified only if he or she becomes subject to a bankruptcy restriction order. Another seven provisions were amended, with the effect that bankruptcy, or being subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order, will result in disqualification.

After consideration of the Order's proposals at the SL1 Stage on 9 October 2007, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment subsequently considered the Order on 17 April 2008. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Assembly affirm the Order. Go raibh maith agat.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Minister wish to make any further comment?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: No, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Insolvency (Disqualification from Office: General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be affirmed.

Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): I beg to move

That the Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

The Order is intended to provide for revised certificate and change-of-name fees that are charged by the General Register Office (GRO), and it includes a proposed date for the commencement of those new fees. The previous fees Order was made in 2005, and this Order proposes new fees to reflect the increases since then in the costs of providing those public services.

Under the current law, fees are not charged for the statutory requirement of registering births and deaths, or for providing one copy of a birth entry at the time of registration. There is no intention to change those statutory provisions. Fees are chargeable, however, for providing other certificates and for further certified copies of registration events, including, where necessary, searching indexes and retrieving records. There are also fees for recording a change of name and for marriage, including the giving of notice and the solemnisation of marriage. Under Government accounting rules, the cost of such chargeable services is recovered by means of a fees Order, as provided for in the relevant legislation. It is in that context that this Order comes before the Assembly.

The General Register Office and district registrars' offices produce more than 175,000 certified copies of vital events each year, for which fees are chargeable. The majority of records are held in bound registers, and the certificate process requires significant administrative input, involving receiving moneys, searching indexes, retrieving entries, producing copies on security paper, necessary checking, certification, and final dispatch.

General Register Office efficiency in those areas has increased, and it is expected to increase further with the implementation of plans to digitise the register entries, thereby creating a fully computerised system. By introducing new services, the General Register Office has improved significantly the options for delivering registration services. Certificates can be ordered from anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day, seven days a week over the Internet or through a programmed 24-hour telephone answering service. Customers can also pay by credit card.

In recognition of those and other developments, for the fourth time, the General Register Office was awarded Charter Mark status in 2007. Customer satisfaction surveys indicate that the office has achieved a satisfaction rate of 98% — I am sure that the Assembly would like the same percentage — and the office has received unsolicited letters praising the service.

To develop the service still further, we will introduce legislative measures to provide greater choice and more flexibility in the registration of vital events and in the places in which they may be registered. Those measures will also provide additional types of certificates to meet public demand and greater access to historic civil registration records to facilitate genealogical enquiries.

As I indicated, the General Register Office is required to cover the cost of chargeable services, including those that are provided by the local register offices that are based in each district council. The previous fees Order was introduced in 2005, and increases are now necessary for some services. The cost of each fee has been calculated individually using work study analysis and takes into account the full range of costs that are involved, including staffing, ancillary services and other costs such as rent and maintenance. A similar cost-recovery system operates in Scotland and in England and Wales.

Passage of the draft Order will ensure that, as has been the case here and in Great Britain, the cost of providing certain services and producing chargeable certificates is borne by the parties that require such certificates and not by the public purse, as would otherwise be the case. However, at the new levels, fees in Northern Ireland for certificates that are issued from the General Register Office are commensurate with those for certificates that are issued centrally by the GRO in England and Wales and from all offices in Scotland. The draft Order has been considered by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and no objections to it have been raised. I commend the draft Order to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister of Finance and Personnel explained, the draft Order sets the fees to recover the costs of the various services that are connected with the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.

On 13 February 2008, the Committee for Finance and Personnel considered the proposals that are contained in the statutory rule and sought further information on a range of issues, including details of the proposed changes in fees, clarification on whether there was an equality issue arising from the proposal to charge for the registration of civil partnerships while apparently not having a charge for registering a marriage, and clarification on whether there was a need for a regulatory impact assessment, given that the increased fees may have an impact on charitable and voluntary bodies that are involved in associated activity, such as genealogical research.

The Committee raised those issues formally with the Department, and it received a substantive written

reply on 20 February 2008, which provided the necessary clarification, including a detailed list of proposed changes and fees, confirmation that registration fees are in place for civil partnerships and marriages, and that both are calculated on the basis of the time that is spent by the registrar on each event. Therefore, the Department advises that no equality issues arise.

Further confirmation was also provided that a regulatory impact assessment was not required, as the fees are calculated on the basis of the actual cost of providing the service. The Department also pointed out that the main users of the services are individuals and businesses rather than charities and voluntary organisations. Having received that clarification, the Committee agreed unanimously on 16 April 2008 to support the Department in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the provisions of the draft Order. Therefore, I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Does the Minister wish to make any further comment?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Chairperson and the Committee for their work on, and co-operation with, the draft Order, and I urge Members to support it. If they do so, it will come into operation on 1 June 2008.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

North Belfast: Conflict Resolution

1. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its plans for a task force to tackle interface and conflict resolution work in the North Belfast constituency. (AQO 3435/08)

The First Minister (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): The future that we look forward to will be one without barriers, in which society is characterised by respect, tolerance and interdependence, while sectarianism and racism are consigned to the past. In that context, significant progress has been made in the past three years to improve relationships. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) wishes to ensure that those improved relationships in the community continue.

In his closing statement in the 22 April Adjournment debate on the interfaces in North Belfast, the junior Minister Mr Donaldson confirmed that the Member's proposal of creating a task force for the North Belfast constituency would be considered. OFMDFM will liaise with the Minister for Social Development and the north Belfast community action unit on the issue. In the meantime, our Department and the community action unit continue to engage with communities on an interdepartmental basis to address the important interface and conflict-resolution issues that exist in North Belfast.

Over the past few years, the community action unit has facilitated a north Belfast interface working group, comprising representatives from statutory agencies and community groups, to develop an action plan for interfaces in North Belfast. The action plan contains 10 key recommendations for addressing interface issues. The unit continues to work with the interface working group, and is facilitating the group in developing an application to the International Fund for Ireland to help take forward the key recommendations in the action plan.

OFMDFM also recognises the invaluable work that communities have undertaken to build sustainable relationships that have been the foundation for the peaceful summers of recent years. In recognition of that, I can confirm that funding of up to £100,000 will again be made available in the current financial year to

provide a diversionary programme for young people at risk of becoming involved in interface violence over the summer months, when community tensions can increase.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the First Minister for his response. I also wish to acknowledge the ongoing work of the interface and conflict resolution groups, which continue to be a massive source of inspiration to us all.

The First Minister said that the establishment of a task force was being considered by OFMDFM. What is the timescale, if any, for that? OFMDFM should ensure that the community and voluntary sector are involved in any such task force. The First Minister mentioned the north Belfast community action unit — it should be one of many statutory and voluntary bodies involved in the task force. Go raibh maith agat.

The First Minister: The development of detailed proposals for a programme of cohesion and integration for a shared and better future, which is a part of the Programme for Government, is at an advanced stage.

Our officials briefed the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the current stage of development of the programme for cohesion and integration on 9 April 2008. That programme will tackle issues that affect the established communities and new arrivals. It will build on some of the excellent work that has already been done — particularly by district councils and community organisations — to address the challenges faced by local communities. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of the programme's proposals.

I pay tribute to the north Belfast community action unit, which was established in 2002 to tackle the problems facing the communities in north Belfast. I call on all areas that face, and must remedy, such matters to work with us with great energy to resolve them.

Mr McCausland: Last week, comments were made about the removal of peace walls in North Belfast, and there has been some concern about that. Does the First Minister agree that peace walls can only be removed with the consent of local communities when they feel comfortable about that and when their security and safety can be ensured?

The First Minister: During the US-NI investment conference last week, Mayor Bloomberg called for the removal of peace walls if Northern Ireland is to become a leading hub for global investment. Although I welcomed his remarks, any plans to remove peace walls must be primarily community-driven. The people must act. Outsiders pulling down walls will accomplish nothing. However, when those living on either side of the wall agree to take it down, we will have won a great victory. I look forward to that victory being sealed over and over again in the areas where there has been great trouble in the past.

Mr Cobain: Will the First Minister give greater weight to removing social deprivation and child poverty in North Belfast than that which he intends to give to interface and conflict-resolution issues? Will he set up an inquiry into the impact of water charges on the poorest sections of the community in North Belfast?

The First Minister: I assure the Member that all those matters will be considered, and anything that goes against the well-being of the community must be tackled. We cannot do that in a piecemeal fashion; we must do it in the light of the fact that there has been serious trouble in many areas in our Province, and we must end such trouble. The condition must be diagnosed, and the prescribed remedy must be applied, so that we can win through at the end. That will not be an easy job, but it must be done, and it can be done when we all unite to ensure that it is done.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the First Minister for his comprehensive and detailed response to the question. I congratulate him on his work — symbolically represented by his visit to the site of the Battle of the Boyne with Mr Bertie Ahern, the former Taoiseach — in tearing down the historic wall of division between North and South.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The title of this section of today's business is 'Oral Answers to Questions', Mr Maginness. I am looking for a question. Will you ask a question?

Mr A Maginness: I have a very important question. Will the First Minister make a further contribution to bringing down the historic walls of division that infect and divide the people in North Belfast? Will he go one step further and implement a programme to take down those walls?

The First Minister: I want to do everything that I can to ease the situation. I know North Belfast very well, having lived on the perimeter of that part of our great city. I belonged to the famous Dock ward, which the Member will know.

Mr Storey: The Doc in the Dock ward.

The First Minister: I did not say "the Doc". However, having been elected in that ward four times, I can help the Member if he, too, is keen to go there. *[Laughter.]*

I will do everything possible to help. I am well known in the areas concerned and have talked to people there. Many of my friends, and members of my Church, come from that area. We should use our influence to help those communities and, indeed, for the betterment of the entire city.

The Deputy Speaker: I have given Members some latitude until now. However, this is Question Time — the word "question" is singular. Members will be

allowed only one question under each section; not a multitude of questions.

Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC

2. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the new role of the New York person associated with the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington. (AQO 3383/08)

The First Minister: The Northern Ireland Bureau plays a vital role in supporting the work of the Executive, and the Assembly, in all matters that have a United States dimension. The bureau's purpose is to promote Northern Ireland as a confident, outward-facing region, and to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the United States. The bureau will continue to pursue high-level political communications and build relationships with key federal and state institutions.

The Programme for Government included provision to extend the bureau's remit to New York. The importance of strengthening relationships with key political figures and business executives in New York cannot be overestimated. The appointment of an additional staff member, based in New York, will allow the bureau to widen its outreach programme among key groups. The New York-based officer brings with her a wealth of contacts: in the financial services sector; in the Mayor's office; and in Irish-American business circles, including the influential American Ireland Fund, which has its headquarters in the city.

The post holder has already been responsible for the organisation of two high-profile visits to New York — one by me and the deputy First Minister in December 2007, and my return visit in April 2008. She has also played a key role in successfully bringing about the New York pension fund's recent announcement that it will invest many millions of dollars in projects in Northern Ireland through the Emerald Fund.

Over the next two years, the post holder will be responsible for promoting a positive image of Northern Ireland in the New York consular area, which includes Pennsylvania and the New England states. Her duties will include assisting Invest Northern Ireland in follow-up work with those companies and organisations based in the city that attended last week's highly successful investment conference. She will also have responsibility for supporting the Executive in all their activities in the New York area.

In particular, she will work with the New York State Office of the State Comptroller and the New York City Office of the Comptroller, both of which were represented at the highest level at last week's conference, to seek further opportunities for private investment in Northern Ireland. She will also take responsibility for arranging official visits by Executive Ministers. Other duties will

include the development of mutually beneficial links with the Irish Consulate General and the New York media, the arts, Irish America and wider business communities.

2.45 pm

Mr Hilditch: I thank the First Minister for his comprehensive answer. Could he outline further what future work will be undertaken in that role?

The First Minister: On a day-to-day basis, the post holder will continue to develop high-level contracts and contacts with senior executive officers in corporate America. The post holder is also responsible for all activities in the New York metropolitan area, and the New York consular district, which includes Pennsylvania, New York state and New England. That will enhance the positive image of Northern Ireland, in line with the Programme for Government, and help to develop good international relations. When she has done all that, she will deserve a holiday. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Chéad-Aire.

Can the First Minister tell the House when the proposed international strategy will be completed?

The First Minister: The international strategy will set in context the international roles and responsibilities of the Executive. It will identify the Executive's international strategic aims for the period of the Programme for Government, and will detail the international priorities and activities in which the Executive plans to engage. It is planned that the Executive will endorse the strategy by the end of the summer.

I cannot answer the first part of the Member's question, for I am neither a prophet nor an interpreter.

Mr Elliott: Bearing in mind what the First Minister has said, will he investigate the possibility of creating roles for special Northern Ireland trade commissioners, to lobby key business figures in growing world-beating super economies, such as India, China, Russia and Brazil, with a view to building an inward investment strategy?

The First Minister: I am glad to tell the honourable Member that that has already happened in respect of India. There has been positive support from my friend the Minister with responsibility for that portfolio, who has done well and has already had success in India.

I would like to see Northern Ireland securing jobs from China, Japan and from the whole world. Let them all come to Northern Ireland and enjoy this Province.

OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities

3. **Mr Shannon** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of its staff who have a disability. (AQO 3360/08)

The First Minister: The Northern Ireland Civil Service continues to work with people and their representatives to identify proactive measures that will encourage those who have disabilities to consider a career in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and, when they have been appointed, to remove any barriers to their retention and progression in the service. On 1 April 2008, 12 members of staff had formally recorded a disability. That represents just under 3% of staff in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Regardless of whether staff declare formally that they have a disability, for monitoring purposes, Departments will make reasonable adjustments across the range of employment practices including recruitment, selection, training and development, and working arrangements, to ensure that, compared with non-disabled persons, people with disabilities are not disadvantaged.

Mr Shannon: I thank the First Minister for his positive response. Does he agree that other Departments should take the same actions as OFMDFM to ensure that people with a disability have the same opportunities as able-bodied applicants? People with a disability must know, and be assured, that they can become part of the workforce — not just in OFMDFM but in all Departments.

The First Minister: I do not think that there is any difference between what happens in my and my deputy's Department and the other Departments. The rules are the same for all, and it is for Government to encourage people to apply and to ensure there is fair play on employment.

Mr McNarry: Will the First Minister indicate the current state of disabled access to public buildings used by Government Departments? Specifically, will he comment on access for people with a disability to areas that the Assembly is responsible for — namely how they can gain access to Parliament Buildings?

The First Minister: When people with a disability are employed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service, that organisation makes reasonable adjustments to help them carry out their jobs to the best of their abilities. The responsibility for that matter rests, not only with my Department, but with the whole Executive.

If any Member has information that people with a disability are not receiving a fair deal as regards employment they should take up those cases. If the honourable gentleman knows of any particular instances, I would be happy to take up those cases.

Mr P Ramsey: Will the First Minister explain what actions his Department is taking to ensure that the percentage of people with disabilities working in Government Departments reflects the percentage of people as a whole with disabilities? Furthermore, will he ensure that all Departments are vigorously progressive on this matter?

The First Minister: Care is taken during the recruitment process to ensure that job specifications and advertisements do not require, or imply, that unnecessary physical requirements are needed. When applicants indicate that they have a disability, OFMDFM liaises with them and their representatives to put reasonable adjustments in place to enable them to compete in the recruitment process. Those adjustments are always made according to an individual's specific requirements and may include test papers being made available in larger print, extra time being allotted for the test or interview or a sign language interpreter being made available during interviews.

European Task Force for NI

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline at what level the European task force will continue to operate.

(AQO 3378/08)

The First Minister: The European Commission has adopted the report from the task force for Northern Ireland. Additionally, it has signalled its commitment at the very highest level to continue to work with us to reap the maximum benefit — both operationally and financially — from the European Union. The European Commission has also confirmed that the task force will remain active to help follow up on the many leads set out in the report. Those include: how to improve the participation of our universities, research bodies and our private sector in the seventh framework programme; drawing down further support from the trans-European network programme for infrastructure improvement and the identification of European policy initiatives and programmes that could assist in modernising our economy.

Mr Hamilton: On this, the occasion of the First Minister's final Question Time, I praise Dr Paisley for his efforts in the past year to promote Northern Ireland at every opportunity, and I congratulate him on his many successes — including the establishment of the EU task force. In that respect, he is leaving his successor a firm foundation on which to build. Will he outline some of the major investments that he has overseen during his year in office?

The First Minister: I thank my friend for his kind remarks. I will not be standing here to answer questions for much longer, but I will be about, listening, and, no doubt, I will make my own contributions in my own way.

We sought to showcase Northern Ireland in a positive light on as many occasions as possible, and I did so during my visits to Brussels, Washington, New York, Edinburgh and London. It is a pleasure to see Northern Ireland move forward in a more confident manner — looking to the future and aiming for greater ability,

stability and economic prosperity. By early 2008, the Executive had agreed a Programme for Government — despite the fact that many people thought that it could not be done.

I read in a newspaper today that some individuals say that we have only shame to offer our people. I want to nail strongly that lie today: we have seen many successes, and we will see even bigger successes in the future.

Local Ministers have been involved in decision-making on local issues, and they have contributed to developing an economy that can compete on the global stage and that can ensure that we seize the opportunity to deliver a better future for all. Some people said that the investment conference would not work. A certain gentleman, who thinks that he knows everything, told me that the American economy was about to collapse. He said that there would be no hope for us if that happened. Our ancestors lived in an era in which there was no United States of America, and they still lived and took their porridge.

I remind Members that valuable investments have been committed in the past weeks, especially during the investment conference, which delivered £63 million from US companies to create almost 1,100 new jobs over the next three years, and a £70 million investment from Bombardier to safeguard another 1,100 jobs. There were other equally important announcements last week, such as the opening of the new office for Bloomberg in Belfast and a £7 million investment by Independent News and Media in its plant in Newry.

Members should not forget the decision, in principle, to establish an office of a commissioner for older people; the introduction of legislation to create a commission for victims and survivors, so that they can finally address the needs and concerns of those groups; and legislation aimed at improving the lives of people with disabilities.

Over the course of 25 meetings, the Executive have considered 200 papers, reviewing the previous Administration's decisions in key policy areas to ensure that they match the Executive's key priorities.

3.00 pm

Since May 2007, 14 Bills have been introduced, and a further nine are scheduled for introduction before the summer recess — I could go on. All this has been achieved from a standing start and in spite of everything that our opponents cast at us and their continual chorus that we are not doing enough and that we are dithering — some of them are not only dithering, they are on the ground, unable to reach decisions. The contrary view to theirs — which I believe is the view of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland, whether they are unionists or nationalists — is that we have made a solid start and have built the foundations, and

we can now go on to build the building that will be a credit to this part of the world and this part of Ireland.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Bluetongue

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the procedures she will put in place to prevent future cases of bluetongue. (AQO 3427/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Bluetongue virus is spread by infected midges, so it is very difficult to control, but I will continue to do all that I can to minimise the risk of further cases. There are two ways that the bluetongue virus could be introduced here: from imported animals that have been infected with bluetongue prior to importation, or by wind-borne spread of infected midges.

The biggest immediate threat to our herds and flocks is from imported cattle and sheep. I have successfully lobbied the European Commission to have bluetongue movement controls strengthened. All the controls that are available to us have been put in place. Those include a derogation that we successfully applied for to allow us to prevent the import of animals over 90 days old, unless they meet very strict conditions. As a result of that, I have been able to replace the suspension of certain imports, which I introduced on 1 March with the agreement of the Executive. My action has been justified by the tightening of the movement controls by the European Commission.

Overall, the new measures provide us with protection that is at least equivalent to that provided by the former suspension of certain imports. Also, a rigorous post-import testing regime has been put in place for any cattle and sheep imported here for breeding and production. Such animals are tested twice before they are allowed to move, and importers must also apply strict housing conditions to the imported animals, to reduce any disease risk to other animals. The only exception to that is in respect of animals from the South, as it has a disease-free status similar to ours.

My veterinary staff continue to assess the disease-risk situation. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) staff are also working closely with industry stakeholders on bluetongue prevention strategies, and they do not consider that any other measures are necessary at this time. I continue to urge farmers and livestock dealers to think very

carefully before importing any animals that may have been exposed to bluetongue.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I welcome her acknowledgement of the very serious threat that the bluetongue virus presents to the farming industry, as well as the support that she has provided at every level in order to eradicate the scourge. I know that she has no power over the way that the wind blows, particularly when it is coming from Scotland, but when will she act to ensure that adequate supplies of vaccine are placed with manufacturers, and how will she ensure that the vaccine is made available to those who need it?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I want everyone to be clear about when vaccination can take place. Under EU rules, vaccination against bluetongue is only allowed within a protection zone; that means that we cannot vaccinate until the disease is present. However, that said, I am considering a vaccination strategy as part of our plan to tackle the disease, should it arrive here. I am considering all the options that are open to us to ensure that we are prepared. As part of that planning process, a without-prejudice application for co-funding of a vaccination programme has been submitted to the Commission for consideration. If I conclude that it is necessary to order vaccine, I will do so.

I will be pleased to update the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on the details of our deliberations and proposals about this issue to date, and I will be seeking its input to this major policy area. I welcome the realisation that I cannot control everything.

Mr McCarthy: You do your best.

Dr W McCrea: In a recent press release, the Minister described the new controls that the European Commission recommended to limit the spread of bluetongue to our farms. Will those measures go far enough to prevent any such spread? Given the warmer weather and the high prevalence of midges, what assurances can the Minister give to the House that her Department is in a position to eradicate any further outbreaks immediately upon detection? Although it is true that the vaccinations cannot be administered until particular criteria are established, will the Minister tell us whether the vaccine has been ordered in the case of an emergency?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said, I am considering those issues. I will attend the Committee meeting tomorrow, at which I hope to be able to give more detail.

The European Commission has implemented several legislative amendments, which help to strengthen our controls. Furthermore, we have been granted a derogation to apply more stringent import conditions on animals that are over 90 days old. Six months ago we probably would never have conceived that we

would be able to amend regulation 1266/2007 to that extent. However, because of emerging scientific evidence from the north Antrim case, we have been able to move the Commission to amend the regulations.

We punched above our weight on that issue, and we provided the leadership necessary to protect the industry. By and large, the industry welcomed the steps that have been taken so far.

Mr Burns: Will the Minister tell us what levels of compensation farmers may receive if any flocks or herds are required to be put down this summer because of bluetongue?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: When bluetongue is detected in imported animals that have been affected by, or exposed to, infection prior to arriving here, compensation is not paid if those animals are culled. In cases in which the Department culls animals that are infected with the disease, but have not been imported, compensation can be paid at half the value of the animal immediately before it became infected. In other cases, compensation is paid at the value of the animal immediately before it was slaughtered.

In the north Antrim case, the animals in question were culled, as a precautionary measure, before the full test results were received and prior to the epidemiological investigation being completed. That is normal procedure to prevent the introduction and spread of disease to an area that has been free from disease. The case is further complicated by the need to consider fully the emerging scientific evidence about the spread of the disease.

We had little power to stop imports, and we had to use all possible measures to encourage farmers and livestock dealers not to import cattle. The whole issue about compensation is linked to that.

We did what we had to do to protect the industry from the disease. Had we not acted when we did in February, the economic consequences of importing bluetongue would be huge.

Communication with the Fishing Industry

2. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she proposes to improve her Department's communication with the fishing industry. (AQO 3379/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department already enjoys good lines of communication with the fishing industry. There is regular contact about the development of policy and legislation, and, at quayside, through the work of the Sea Fisheries Inspectorate.

There is always room for improvement, and we can do more to develop a more collaborative relationship

between the industry and fisheries scientists in order to achieve a shared, common purpose to ensure that the precious and finite fish stocks of our shores are exploited in a sustainable manner.

On 28 April 2008, I announced that I was setting up a fisheries forum to facilitate dialogue between all key stakeholders in the industry — including in the Department — to work together to address the economic difficulties faced by the industry. I want that forum to arrive at a consensus about the long-term strategic approach that is needed to achieve a profitable and sustainable future.

I know that it will not be a straightforward process. There is no easy way out of the current difficulties that the fishing industry faces. However, we must not miss the opportunity to establish a framework that enables the industry — with support from the European fisheries fund — to adapt, and to address effectively, the problems that prevented it from achieving a stable and long-term profitable future.

Mr Hamilton: One of the most common complaints that I hear from the fishing industry concerns poor communication from the Department. That has been borne out by answers that the Minister has given me. Since taking office, she has met representatives from the farming industry over five times more than she has met those from the fishing industry. That is despite the fact that the fishing industry is going through a crisis.

What does the Minister propose to do to improve lines of communication, particularly as she seeks to forge a long-term strategy, which we all support? What impact will a lack of participation in the forum have —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. At the beginning of Question Time, you were present when I warned that I would accept only one question from each Member. You managed to ask three. I will accept only one question —

Mr Hamilton: I am sure that I was not the only Member to do that, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The rule will be applied from now on. The asking of multiple questions prevents Members further down the list from getting their opportunity to ask their questions, and that includes Members from your own party. I insist that you ask only one question.

Mr Hamilton: At least I got two in. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The establishment of a fisheries forum was valuable in helping the Department to communicate effectively with the fishing industry. All the fisheries stakeholders will be included on the new forum. I want to see representatives from the main fishermen's organisations, processors, the inshore fisheries sector, scientists, representatives from environmental organisations and my officials all

working better together. This week, my officials will write to stakeholders to request their participation.

The farming industry is much more than five times larger than the fishing industry, and huge pressures exist in the farming industry, particularly in the pig sector. The fishing industry has received far more time and attention than its size merits. That shows my commitment to the fishing industry, and my commitment to ensuring a sustainable future for it.

Mr P J Bradley: The Minister referred to the recent announcement that a forum has been set up to discuss the way forward for the fishing industry. She also referred to that in the answer to Mr Hamilton's question.

During the past 12 months, the Minister held a series of meetings with the main industry stakeholders. What other groups or individuals does the Minister hope to meet that could be better informed than the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation, the Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation, the Northern Ireland Trawlermen's Trading Company, or Northern Ireland Seafood?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: No other organisations could give better intelligence on the state of the fishing industry. The organisations that the Member named will be vital components of the fisheries forum. The other bodies that I mentioned will complement that process, but it is fishermen's organisations to which the Department will listen, and has been listening all along.

Farmed Animals: Welfare

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the action she is taking to guarantee adherence to the regulations on the welfare of farmed animals. (AQO 3376/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: DARD has an important and active role to play in developing national and EU animal welfare legislation, and in educating livestock keepers in standards of animal welfare. Owners and keepers of farm animals are required to comply fully with EU and domestic legislation, which stipulates minimum standards for keeping farm animals.

The legislation contains specific requirements about record keeping, freedom of movement, buildings, equipment and feeding and watering of animals. My Department's Veterinary Service carries out farm-animal welfare inspections against those standards. Against legal requirements, farm animals may be assessed on farms, in markets, in slaughterhouses and during transport. Enforcement is used where appropriate.

The Department produces codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock. Those provide advice and

guidance for the upkeep of farm animals and details of relevant legislation. Livestock farmers and employers are required by law to ensure that all those who attend to livestock are familiar with, and have access to, the relevant codes. My Department's Veterinary Service also investigates welfare complaints from members of the public, and carries out targeted farm inspections if welfare issues are identified by a veterinary officer working in an abattoir.

Moreover, in order to obtain a single farm payment, a farmer must meet certain animal welfare-related cross-compliant statutory management requirements. Cross-compliance and inspections are, therefore, carried out on approximately 400 farms — 1% of all farm businesses — each year. Those inspections are spot checks to verify that the industry complies with existing standards and, in line with Commission regulations, individual farmers receive minimal notice of such inspections.

The Department regularly revisits farms with a history of welfare violations to ensure that corrective action has been taken and that better standards are being maintained.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for her answer, but does she agree that penalties for those who are found to be in breach of the regulations are not severe enough? If she agrees, what plans has she made to improve that situation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department can do only what it has the power to do. We cannot —

Mr McNarry: That is not what I asked.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We do not allow people to keep animals, and a farmer does not need a licence to keep farm animals. We have no power of seizure, even in the case of a ban. We must take such new cases to court — and have done so on several occasions — and that is where the penalties are imposed. The power to seize animals, and the specifics of the Member's question, will be considered fully in any review of animal-welfare legislation in the North.

3.15 pm

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What plans does the Minister have to improve protection for non-farm species of animals?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972, it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. Unlike in Britain where, until recently, animal welfare legislation dated back to 1911, legislation in the North had already been updated and consolidated by the 1972 Act. However, I recognise that the legislation is now over 30 years old and, as

such, there is a need to review it to ensure that it provides sufficient protection to all animals. I have, therefore, asked my officials to finalise a report that will summarise the outcome of the responses to a consultation on new proposals, after which I will decide what new legislation is required.

All-Ireland Food Exhibition

4. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the number of Northern Ireland companies that attended the opening of the all-Ireland Food Exhibition in Belfast.

(AQO 3411/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: IFEX is an annual international food, drink, hospitality and retail exhibition for Ireland, which is held in the North every two years. The latest was the twenty-second IFEX event, which played host to a comprehensive range of Irish and international products and services across the food, drink, hospitality and retail industries.

Information that was supplied by the organisers of the IFEX exhibition confirms that 77 of the 145 exhibitors attending the show were companies based in the North of Ireland. In addition, some of the large food-service companies included in those figures had additional local company representatives and products on their stands at IFEX. I opened the exhibition and visited many of the stands, and I was impressed by the organisation of the event and the quality of the local produce and services on display. The exhibition reaffirmed my view that we have food products in this island that are the equal of — and, in many cases, superior to — competing products in the marketplace.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the Minister doing to support the marketing and promotion of local products in the North?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Under current state-aid rules, Government funds cannot be used to fund a campaign promoting local produce. However, there are other support mechanisms. For example, my Department administers the regional food programme, which aims to promote quality regional food and increase its consumption in the islands of Ireland and Britain.

Under that programme, assistance is available to develop and expand profitable and sustainable markets by encouraging better co-operation and communication among all sectors of the food industry. The regional-food programme also complements the work that my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) have been doing to implement the recommendations of the July 2004 'Fit for Market' report of the food strategy group. The programme

offers grant aid to producer groups in five key areas: regional fairs and exhibitions; information programmes; award ceremonies; seminars and workshops; and market intelligence and research.

One of the objectives of the programme is to assist the local agrifood industry to develop and expand profitable and sustainable markets. The programme was subsequently complemented by the formation of Food Promotion NI, an industry group representing the entire supply chain, which is now jointly introducing and funding a domestic marketing campaign to promote local food, named Good Food is in our Nature. Over the past 12 months, the regional-food programme has provided financial support to a range of successful events, such as the food pavilion at the Balmoral Show, which showcased the wide range of quality local produce that is available and brought the industry together in a common cause.

Mr Savage: Were any companies from outside Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland invited to attend IFEX, and how many did so?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I do not have the level of detail to answer that question. I will respond to the Member in writing.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo í mo cheist ar an Aire.

What is the Minister's assessment of the food-marketing strategy in the Republic of Ireland, which identifies Ireland as the "food island"? What advantages would there be for the agricultural and food industry here if we were to join that strategy —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Which of those two questions do you wish the Minister to answer?

Mr D Bradley: I asked one question and one question only.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There were two questions.

Mr D Bradley: No, there were not; there were two parts to the one question — *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: After all that, I cannot remember the question. Marketing the Food Island campaign in the 26 Counties has been successful, and I would like to see more of that marketing, promotion and campaign work extending to companies from the North so that we have a level playing field. I have raised the matter with ministerial colleagues, and I will continue to do so.

Administration Costs

5. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the percentage of funding awarded to Local Action Groups to deliver

Axis 3 of the Rural Development programme that will be set aside for administration and technical support. (AQO 3351/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The contract to deliver axis 3 of the rural development programme will be with my Department and the seven council joint committees, not with local action groups. The regulation allows for up to 20% of the total expended budget to be used for administration purposes. It should be noted that any joint committee that uses less than that 20% for administration can transfer that underspend to project funding.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for her response. Will she explain why her Department has adopted a so-called competitive process for selecting the social partners for the local action group? Will she further indicate how much she has spent in the seven local action groups to tackle low support and to appoint the groups' members?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Which part of "one question" do Members not understand? I have stated that there should strictly be one question and one question only. Minister, please answer the first part of Mr Bresland's question.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Animation funds have been made available to the local action groups in order to set them up, and I can give the Member details of that in writing. I hope that that answers his question.

Mr Elliott: I am almost afraid to get up, Mr Deputy Speaker — *[Laughter.]*

What impact will the reorganisation of local government in 2011 have on the current proposals for the local action groups? Will those groups continue to exist?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is the second part of one question, according to Member Bradley. The Minister should answer the first part.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We will stick with the current proposals and model. That is because we can get the money out more quickly and because we will not have to go back to the drawing board. Given that my Department wishes to get the money out by the end of the summer, the local action groups that have been set up and constituted will go ahead. The competitiveness that the Member mentioned is about getting the right number of people with the right talents, skills and experience into the local action group in order to achieve the best outcome for the delivery of the rural development programme.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh míle maith agat. Why are the joint committees being asked to formulate themselves as bodies corporate? I hope that the Minister's answer will help me to understand the question. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Having taken legal advice on the issue, my Department has been advised that simply setting up joint committees does not afford the required legal protection. A joint committee would have no legal identity of its own, and all persons and councillors involved could find themselves the subject of legal action at some point. Unlike a simple joint committee, a body corporate has its own legal personality, and establishing the clusters as joint-committees body corporate would afford better protection in any actions that are taken by or against them. Therefore, if, for example, there were court proceedings for a judicial review, the body corporate, rather than its individual members, would be responsible for decisions, subject to that review. In addition, a body corporate has the power to enter into contracts, can acquire and hold any real or personal property for the purposes for which the corporation has been constituted, can dispose of such property, and has the right to employ staff for the performance of its functions. Those powers will provide joint committees as corporations with the element of flexibility and autonomy in programme delivery that they would not otherwise have.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member may be none the wiser but better informed.

Rural Childcare Provision

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking, in conjunction with other Departments, to address the barriers to accessing rural childcare provision in West Tyrone. (AQO 3403/08)

7. **Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the recommendations in the rural childcare report; and the action she is taking to implement these recommendations. (AQO 3405/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: With permission, I will take questions 6 and 7 together.

In July 2007, I established a rural childcare stakeholder group to research and discuss the difficulties associated with childcare in all rural areas, including West Tyrone, and to suggest potential solutions to identified problems. The group's final report sets out the specific challenges facing rural areas as regards transport, accessing existing facilities, affordability of childcare and current providers' ability to access further training courses.

The report also details the current level of childcare provision in rural areas and suggests that, with the exception of childminders, there is no acute lack of rural childcare provision, and that childcare providers such as crèches, playgroups and after-school clubs are operating in rural areas. However, the report highlights many difficulties, such as accessibility and affordability,

which rural families face in being able to make use of the services.

The report's most significant recommendation is that the development of a separate rural childcare strategy is not needed, but working partnerships should be formed to establish a rural childcare funding programme with the aim of addressing rural-specific needs and circumstances.

Other recommendations for my Department include developing and resourcing rural evidence-gathering so that future trends and comparisons can be made on rural circumstances; developing a rural White Paper; and ensuring adequate and monitored rural proofing of Government policies. Those issues will be addressed in work that the Department will be carrying out to prepare the way for a rural White Paper and the role of a rural champion, as set out in the Programme for Government and recently agreed by the Executive.

I will implement the report's key recommendation for DARD by establishing a rural childcare programme as part of my Department's anti-poverty and social inclusion work. My Department will also work with the stakeholder group to identify such areas within the programme and how best to work with other Departments. Funding opportunities for children and young people, including rural childcare, are already an important part of DARD's new rural development programme, with around 5% being devoted to it.

Rural childcare is not an issue for my Department alone; the report raised issues for other Departments too, and in March, I shared the report with them via the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. So far, reaction has been positive and welcoming, endorsing the need for joined-up working to address particular challenges facing rural areas. By adopting a joined-up approach, partners will complement each other's actions, avoid duplicating effort, and deliver real benefits to rural childcare providers and parents.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Urgent Executive business led, understandably, to the Minister's scheduled visit to Eskra childcare centre some months ago being called off. I ask her to find space in her diary to visit the centre and listen at first hand to the views expressed by people in that community? I am trying to extract a commitment from the Minister.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Yes, I will be happy to check my diary to see when I can get to Eskra.

Mr McElduff: Thank you very much.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's commitment to implement the report's recommendations. Will she confirm how DARD will finance future actions to support childcare?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: DARD has received an allocation of £10 million to address anti-poverty and social exclusion in rural areas over the next CSR period. The money will provide the opportunity to work with others inside and outside Government to address a range of issues affecting rural areas, including rural childcare.

I have already said that I also expect funding to be available under the rural development programme, especially through the measures that are being taken forward by local action groups. For example, 57 childcare projects received funding under the rural development programme for 2001 to 2006. Around 54 of those projects were supported under Building Sustainable Prosperity (BSP), Peace II and Peace III, which amounted to just under £2 million. Therefore, quite a lot of investment has been put into rural childcare projects.

Mr K Robinson: I presume that financial costings associated with the recommendations have been undertaken. If so, what role will those play in any future implementation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have already outlined what can be done as regards the £10 million to address social exclusion and anti-poverty and the rural development programme. The rural childcare stakeholders report's recommendations concerned what my Department could do, so this is about looking at other Departments, where DARD fits in, and avoiding duplication so that the best level of service possible is provided to rural dwellers.

Mr McGlone: Excuse me, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I must withdraw my supplementary question. I do not have the relevant information in front of me.

Forest Service Priorities

8. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her priorities for the Forest Service; and the action she is taking to ensure that forests could be better utilised. (AQO 3420/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My priorities for forestry are set out in the forestry strategy. They include a programme for forest expansion, with the long-term goal of doubling the area of forest from 6% to 12% of the land area, and sustainable management of existing woods and forest that takes account of economic, environmental and social-use requirements. More detailed priorities and targets will be included in the Forest Service's business plan.

Proposed business priorities for 2008 include: publishing a strategy on the social and recreational uses of forests in order to set out a clear framework for delivery of those activities; securing operational partners to improve the quality and range of services and visitors' experiences; and bringing forward new legislative proposals to the Assembly to replace the 1953 Forestry

Act. Those proposals will seek to ensure that the Forest Service not only has a duty to supply timber, but to provide recreational access, protect the environment and make use of the development opportunities of forests in a balanced way; optimising the return from the sale of forest products, and implementing the Government's wider market initiatives to secure a better return from assets.

3.30 pm

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Assistance to the Small-Business Sector

1. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he has taken to assist and encourage the small-business sector since May 2007. (AQO 3358/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): Since May 2007, Invest NI has continued to offer a wide range of support to encourage the growth and development of the small-business sector. During the last financial year, it has supported the development of over 3,000 new business starts and delivered nearly 1,200 interventions aimed at improving the management and workforce capability of locally owned small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Invest NI has also encouraged 250 small and medium enterprises to enter export markets for the first time. The agency has also continued to introduce new schemes that focus on supporting small-business growth. For example, the growth-accelerator programme, which was launched in June 2007, is aimed at assisting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow faster in export markets and has, to date, provided over £5 million of support to over 150 companies. That high level of activity signals SMEs' increasing ambition to achieve the scale that is necessary to compete effectively in global markets, and will make a significant contribution to greater wealth and economic growth in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCausland: Will the Minister outline what his Department is doing to encourage local business growth in North Belfast under the Renewing Communities programme?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am particularly grateful to the honourable Member for that specific question. I am delighted to outline what is happening under the Renewing Communities programme in the constituency that we both have the honour to serve in the House. As Members will be aware, the Renewing Communities action plan — under which Invest Northern Ireland is piloting the

Exploring Enterprise programme — covers north, east and south Belfast, the greater Shankill area and Rathcoole.

In summer 2007, I launched the programme in North Belfast. We have engaged the North Belfast Partnership to deliver the business programme with North City Business Centre, and a range of locally tailored initiatives have been developed. The budget was set at £100,000.

Several key achievements have been made, including the participation of 33 people on the certificate in business, with 19 of them achieving NVQ level 2, and 14 achieving NVQ level 3. Several workshops and seminars have also been held. I am delighted to report that, as a direct result of those, 21 participants have begun the business start-up programme to date, with six or eight having since started a business.

Ms J McCann: Given that the social economy has been successful in developing small businesses that employ local people and, therefore, give something back to the community, can the Minister outline the discussions that he has had with Invest NI about the implementation of the next Social Entrepreneurship programme, and what funding —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. At the start of Question Time, for which Ms McCann was present, I said that Members may ask only one question. However, some Members have asked more than one question, preventing others from getting on the list. Therefore, I will take the first question.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The point the Member raised about the social economy is a valid one. As she and other Members of the House will know, I am greatly interested in that area.

I have made it clear that my Department will maintain responsibility for developing social economy policy. That follows a meeting I had with the Social Economy Network. I continue to work with Invest Northern Ireland on a range of issues regarding the social economy, including the one that the Member mentioned.

Last week, I was delighted to be in my constituency for a meeting that previewed a major social economy event that will take place at St George's Market in June. I remain committed to improving the prospects of that sector.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer, in which he outlined a number of programmes in which Invest Northern Ireland is involved.

Will he accept that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been particularly impressed by the work of Enterprise Northern Ireland, and is concerned about the withdrawal of the Start a Business grant? Will he ensure that as changes take place in the context of the Review of Public Administration that there will be no reduction in Invest Northern Ireland's interest in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises

and that matters will not be left loosely for local government to tidy up?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for his question. I assure him that, in the move towards the review of public administration, we will meet him on the point that he raised today and previously in the House. I am determined not to let the matter fall between two stools.

Mr Durkan referred to the Start a Business programme, which has been very successful and which will continue to be so. He mentioned the withdrawal of the £400 grant. However, the review showed that, for the vast majority of people, the funding was immaterial to their decision about whether to embark on the programme.

The withdrawn funds will be reinvested in the programme, and will provide more training courses, online resources, and enhanced mentoring. I reassure the Member on those points.

Action Renewables Programme

2. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the impact of the Action Renewables Programme upon householders, business and the community sector. (AQO 3352/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Action Renewables' remit is to raise awareness of climate change, to stimulate knowledge of the issues associated with conventional-energy use and to promote renewable-energy solutions.

An evaluation of the Action Renewables programme during the period from 1 April 2005 to 30 September 2006 indicated that Action Renewables successfully implemented a wide range of activities in line with its business plans for that period and, in doing so, achieved high levels of customer satisfaction. During that period, some of the outcomes achieved included 285 schools visited; 300 news articles published; 300 installers trained; and 258 not-for-profit organisations provided with sustainable-energy advice.

A further evaluation covering the period from 1 October 2006 to 31 March 2008 is currently under way and is due to be completed by the end of May 2008.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his response. How much funding does the Department give to the Action Renewables programme? What plans does the Minister have to develop Action Renewables' role in the future?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Action Renewables receives a budget of approximately £1 million a year. My Department recently received an independent review of the Northern Ireland sustainable-energy market. That identified an ongoing role for Action Renewables. At present, the exact nature of that

role is under economic appraisal to ensure value for money and economic viability in the future.

Mr D Bradley: In view of your earlier admonishment, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have fashioned several questions together in such a way as it will appear as though I am asking just one question. *[Laughter.]*

Does the Minister agree that a greater environmental impact would be achieved by replacing the current fragmented system of renewable energy agencies with one overarching, cohesive body that is responsible for offering expert advice and direction?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I congratulate the honourable Member — one could not see the joins. That was seamless and efficient.

The Member makes a good point about the number of bodies that are active in the field of energy efficiency. I mentioned the independent review of the sustainable energy market, which showed that, compared with other regions of a similar population size, Northern Ireland has more bodies that deliver advice on such matters as sustainable energy, energy efficiency, micro-generation and large-scale renewables. My Department will evaluate that report, and I will introduce proposals after close scrutiny. I take the Member's point on board.

Mr K Robinson: High fuel costs are a reality, and they are unlikely to fall in the immediate future. Does the Minister agree that urgent and imaginative action is necessary so that alternative fuels become a practical reality for domestic, commercial and business consumers?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Action Renewables is doing its job in heightening awareness and interest in that area. Along with many other bodies, it is becoming more closely involved in promoting the necessary action.

The honourable Member is correct to say that other forms of energy production must be considered, rather than relying solely on fossil fuels. In recent days, prices have increased because of the vast increase in world prices for wholesale gas and oil. Sustainable renewable sources of energy must be carefully considered, not only from a sustainability and environmental point of view, but because we are now obligated under European Union law to meet very stringent targets for the reduction of reliance on fossil fuels, and to reduce carbon emissions. My Department is committed to that and is leading a co-ordinated approach in the Executive on that issue.

Increase in Gas Prices

3. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the impact of the 28% increase in Phoenix gas prices on low-income families. (AQO 3458/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The recent announcement of the 28% increase in gas prices by Phoenix Supply Ltd was unwelcome news for all consumers. However, it comes as no surprise in the current climate, whereby wholesale oil and gas prices have been increasing steadily over recent months.

The Department for Social Development is spending some £35.4 million on alleviating fuel poverty. However, that cannot offset the upward surge in global fuel prices, which is clearly outside Government control. My Department will continue to work with the regulator to facilitate market arrangements, such as the opening of the Belfast gas market to competition, and the creation of a single electricity market. Those types of measures have the potential to exert downward pressure on energy prices, thus reducing the burden of energy costs on low-income families, and everyone else.

Mrs M Bradley: What action is the Minister taking to protect the vulnerable and the poor from spiralling energy prices?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As I said in my previous reply, a range of measures are being implemented by the Department for Social Development to try to alleviate fuel poverty. A considerable budget of £35.4 million has been allocated for that purpose. We are conscious of the fact that income, energy efficiency and fuel prices all have a role to play in fuel poverty, and that the steep rise in fuel prices is pushing more people into fuel poverty.

3.45 pm

We are suffering so much primarily because we have lower income levels. It is important that we continue striving to alleviate fuel poverty. When I was in the Department for Social Development, we introduced the warm homes scheme, which is an important aspect of work in that area.

It is important that my Department continue to do what it can. Last year, we provided £5.6 million to defray the 2007-08 energy efficiency level, which reduced tariffs by approximately 1% below what they would otherwise have been. We supported the mutualisation of energy assets, which, once again, saves consumers a considerable amount of money. We are also considering measures such as a single electricity market and common arrangements for gas, which, in the long term, would bear down on prices.

All those matters are important, and I will continue to play my part, along with colleagues, on the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which is chaired by the Minister for Social Development.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has already detailed the impact of fuel prices on low-income families, pensioners and disabled people. Will he outline any discussions

that he and his Executive colleagues may have had with the regulator in order to reduce fuel prices and keep them as low as possible for those groups?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have met the regulator, and I will meet him again soon. Members should bear in mind that, at the end of the day, the Government do not set prices. For gas and electricity, the regulator has — *[Interruption.]*

Somebody shouted something about setting the tax on fuel. The honourable Member used to be in another place but is no longer — he should realise that it is Westminster's responsibility to set taxation for such matters, and it is not for the Northern Ireland Assembly to do so. We do not set prices or taxes, but the Member can rest assured that the devolved Administration will do everything in their power to deal with the impact of higher prices, especially on low-income families, and the interdepartmental working group, under the chairmanship of the Minister for Social Development, is important for bringing together all the disparate elements in Government in order to consider that important matter.

Mr Kennedy: On the subject of increased fuel costs, the Minister will be aware that, unfortunately, electricity costs will soon rise again dramatically. Will the Minister give his best estimate of likely fuel-price movements during the latter part of this year?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It would be wrong for me to speculate about such matters. However, we are all aware that the rise in world oil prices, which are virtually 100% higher than they were last year — \$120 a barrel compared with \$60 a barrel, and even that was historically high — will inevitably affect energy prices. It will be a matter for the regulator and the Consumer Council to make representations to NIE about any suggested price increases, and we wait to see the level of such increases.

Nevertheless, my Department will continue to do what it can to bear down on the matter, and the single electricity market was introduced specifically because it is mutually beneficial to consumers in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. In the next 10 years, it should produce savings of more than £100 million for industrial and domestic consumers and dynamic benefits of between £150 million and £170 million. Those are real actions being taken by Government to bear down on prices and, importantly, to ensure security of supply. We will do what we can, and we all hope that the wholesale prices for gas and oil will eventually settle and come back down, which is what is required in all areas.

Biofuels

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans to encourage the use of biofuels as alternative sources of energy.
(AQO 3380/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department recognises the potential in Northern Ireland for bioenergy, including biofuels, and, last year, established a bioenergy interdepartmental group, including representatives from the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, Environment, Regional Development, and Finance and Personnel, and Invest Northern Ireland.

Co-ordination will enable Northern Ireland to optimise the potential benefits of bioenergy across the energy, agriculture, enterprise, transport and environment sectors and will contribute to renewable energy and greenhouse-gas-emission targets.

However, it will be important to ensure that such development is sustainable and benefits Northern Ireland in the long term.

On behalf of the interdepartmental group, my Department has appointed consultants to assess the potential for the sustainable development of the bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland. The results of that important study are intended to inform the development in 2008-09 of a cross-departmental strategy for the sector.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister will be aware that farmers in other parts of the world have been encouraged to diversify and grow crops for biofuels. How does he respond to the argument that growing crops for that purpose contributes to world food shortages and increases in the price of food?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member has raised an important point about the tension between trying to meet renewable energy targets and increase the energy from those sources and, at the same time, recognising the detrimental effects of that, two of which he mentioned.

Food shortages and the increase in food prices are not entirely due to the growth of crops for biofuels; other reasons include a greater demand from China and the Far East for different types of food, and harvest shortages. However, there is growing concern about the effect of growing more crops for biofuels. That is why I share the decision of the UK Government to not support higher targets unless they are sustainable, which includes being confident that they will not lead to food poverty.

The Renewable Fuels Agency has been asked to undertake a review of the impact of biofuel production, including such indirect impacts. It is important that we recognise the problem and adjust our policy in light of

what happens on the ground, instead of pursuing something out of an ideological attachment to a particular way of moving forward in energy production.

Mr Cree: The Minister has answered most of my question. We are all concerned about the cost of fuel. However, has any work been done to address the dichotomy between having land available for the production of biocrops and having enough land for food stocks for people and livestock? That tension must be tackled in a meaningful manner.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member is correct to reinforce that point. Those matters are raised between my Department and the Government, who have the national responsibility. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have also raised the possible impact on food production at G8 meetings. The growth of crops for biofuels is an issue that people are well appraised of, and it is correct that we take it seriously. I am grateful to honourable Members for raising it.

Mr A Maginness: I urge the Minister to act cautiously in relation to biofuels. Is he aware of the call by the European Environment Agency for the EU to suspend its 10% target on biofuels? Is he also aware that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Good try, Mr Maginness.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As time goes on and Members try to slip in extra questions, you remain as alert as ever.

Yes; I am aware of that issue, and it arises because of the same concerns. It is a testimony to Members that they are raising such issues, and I will ensure that those concerns are fed to the Government for use in their discussions in Europe.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Changed Economic Environment

6. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the implications of the recent credit problems and general global economic slow down for the economic targets and growth strategy set out in the Programme for Government; if there will be any change in the economic-development aims and strategy resulting from the changed economic environment. (AQO 3461/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The current global economic conditions present us with enormous challenges. I have commented on those issues in the House and in the media. The economic priorities and targets set out in the Programme for Government were framed in the context of the global economic slowdown and the uncertainties in the financial markets. Therefore, I do not see a need to revise them.

However, the targets will be continually tracked and monitored against changing markets, and, where appropriate, they will be amended over the current Programme for Government period.

Mr O'Loan: I am reminded of what it is like to be at school, and I do not mean as a teacher. Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will allow me to congratulate the Minister and his associates on the organisation of the US investment conference. Everything possible was done to make the conference a success. In the light of the international pressures that have been mentioned, what signals on prospective investment here did the Minister get from those who attended the conference?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am very grateful to the honourable Member for his comments. It is only right to record our gratitude and thanks to everybody who put in such an enormous amount of time and effort over many months to make the conference the success that it was. Members of the House, Committee members and others played an important role. The feedback has been very positive, but the hard work to ensure that something tangible is delivered from that conference begins now. I believe that it will be.

We recognise that we live in a time of great global economic challenges, and the Province is not immune to those challenges. We may be small, but we are subject to the turmoil that affects the global economy. Energy prices are an example of that turmoil.

I shall make two points on the conference. First, it was always intended, and has always been the case, that the possible investment that flows from such a conference will not happen immediately but over the next 18 months to two years. However, holding the conference certainly puts Northern Ireland in a much better position, and our doing so gives us a far greater opportunity to obtain investment over the next 18 to 24 months than had the conference not taken place.

Secondly, a number of investors said to me that the current financial climate presents Northern Ireland with an opportunity, because people are looking at reducing costs and at becoming leaner and more efficient. Potential investors with an operation in the City of London or in Dublin, where property is expensive and where attracting expertise and skills costs more, may look for a near-shore solution, and Northern Ireland offers a very good, competitive cost environment. It is close to customers and culturally compatible, so, in many ways, the current climate does provide Northern Ireland with an opportunity. Several executives indicated that, in this climate, they were looking ever more closely at places such as Northern Ireland in which to set up cost-centred operations.

From both those perspectives, the conference was extremely worthwhile, and I am grateful to the honourable Member for his comments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry that the Member is reminded of being at school, but somebody must deal with naughty schoolboys who cannot follow simple instructions.

Mr Burnside: I went to Coleraine Academical Institution — I would not dare to ask more than one question.

Mr O’Loan mentioned credit problems, which is an understatement. Currently, when financing an investment, whether here or anywhere else, one must finance the equity and finance the debt. In the absence of the credit markets being open at the minute, will the Minister ask Invest NI to show some more flexibility? As a result of banks’ recent dreadful performance, companies that finance debt are unable to do so, so can Invest NI be more flexible when it comes to the debt financing of investment?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am grateful to the honourable Member for pointing out a particular current problem. Invest NI, within its remit of accounting for public expenditure, has done a very good job, particularly over the past year. There will be greater challenges in the year ahead.

In Foyle this morning, I was pleased to be able to announce the creation of 150 jobs by Fujitsu — 120 in Londonderry and 30 in Belfast. That will bring Fujitsu’s total workforce here to almost 1,000 people by 2010 or 2011. Those are very high-paying, highly skilled jobs in the information and communication technology sector. It indicates that people are willing to invest, despite the current difficulties, and why? Companies are telling us that we in Northern Ireland have the skills, the people, and the education system in place that provides them with what they need.

I am very encouraged by that, and it certainly reinforces my view that the Programme for Government is concentrating on the right issues — those broad issues that will drive our economy forward.

4.00 pm

Dr Farry: In light of the economic downturn, there is a certain logic in focusing on Northern Ireland’s inbuilt competitive strengths. Therefore, what response would the Minister give to David Varney and others who have suggested that we should focus on low costs, as opposed to our inbuilt strengths, as a way of attracting investment?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Sir David Varney made several recommendations and suggestions, some of which are already covered in the Programme for Government, and others which we shall examine soon. Some of the rest of the recommendations can be examined over a longer period, as they may not be as urgent. However, it is important to realise that we cannot compete with low costs and low wages. Such an approach will not work for Northern Ireland, just as it

will no longer work for any modern western economy. We must, therefore, focus on our knowledge base and skills that are not easily transferable out of Northern Ireland.

At the same time as seeking to attract foreign direct investment, we are also trying to grow our local indigenous companies. We are setting stringent and stretching targets to increase export potential. In fact, Invest Northern Ireland invests more in local indigenous industries than it does in attracting foreign direct investment. Those measures play an all-important part in growing our economy.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Education and the Economy

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the growing needs for our indigenous economy, with particular reference to the engineering sector, and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward proposals, complementary to the Department for Employment and Learning strategy 'Further Education Means Business' and the Programme for Government objective under PSA 2 to "increase skills and career choices in science, technology, engineering and maths (stem) subjects", geared towards our primary and post-primary school children that will address the future needs of our economy.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this motion, which is the first that the Education Committee has tabled. This is a timely debate, given that last week's investment conference highlighted the importance of an education system that can deliver the type of skills that firms require. In light of that conference, and the evidence that the Committee has heard from witnesses to date, the Committee decided to table the motion.

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

The Committee heard evidence from groups that had expressed an interest in this matter. One of the first companies to appear before the Committee was Schrader Electronics Ltd, which is based in my constituency of East Antrim and in south Antrim. It is a large engineering employer that employs 1,000 people. Its representatives outlined some of the company's difficulties in recruiting people to fill engineering and technical posts.

When that company first arrived here in 2000, it had no real problems at all. However, since then, 50% of its jobs for graduates have had to be re-advertised because it could not find people to apply for the jobs in the first instance. Some 28% of the company's hourly paid workers are now foreign nationals, rather than people from Northern Ireland.

FG Wilson has a manufacturing plant that is also sited in my constituency. Last week, someone from that company told me that 70% of those employed during its last recruitment drive came from outside Northern Ireland, because the company could not find local people with the necessary skills.

There has been a 60% drop in the number of students who have gained engineering and technical qualifications.

Therefore, from what we have heard, the education system in Northern Ireland is clearly not as effective as it should be in addressing the skills gap for technicians and engineers. Even though a higher percentage of young people in Northern Ireland take science and maths at school, we still have that skills shortage.

I hope that the Minister does not think that I am giving her ammunition with which to attack me, because normally when she hears talk of deficiencies in the education system, she immediately has a Pavlov's dog response and things are blamed on the 11-plus and everything else. The record in Northern Ireland is better than that in non-selective areas in England, Scotland and Wales. We consistently have a much higher percentage of children in secondary education who go on to take science and maths. Therefore, just in case the Minister was hoping to employ that argument, let me knock it on the head.

The second group that came before the Education Committee was the education task force, which gave us some insight into how to develop a strategy to deal with the problems that Schrader Electronics articulated to us. That task force wants to see an education-driven system of economic growth in Northern Ireland. Although I stress that it is important that other agencies are engaged in that endeavour, I want to focus on what education can contribute.

Last week's US-Northern Ireland investment conference showed that education lies at the heart of the economy. The education task force, which comprised teachers from various sectors, as well as industrialists and engineers from Queen's University and the University of Ulster, made several recommendations. Its full report, which I do not have time to discuss, can be found on the Assembly website. I believe that it has also been deposited in the Assembly Library, and some Members might have received copies of it from the Committee Clerk.

I wish to highlight some of those recommendations. The first was the importance of dialogue between industry, business and education with regard to creating a skills agenda. Schrader Electronics said that it was in discussion with the two universities about giving students and lecturers placements in the firm to ascertain the skills that were needed so that courses could be designed around the company's technical requirements. That is important, because on the one hand people from industry complain that the education system does not deliver, yet on the other, it is often unclear what industrialists want that system to deliver.

The second recommendation was that there is an education supply side in Northern Ireland that does not adequately meet the needs of society. That must be tackled. Equally, however, business must articulate what it demands of education. Schools also need to

place a greater emphasis in the curriculum on business vocations. The education task force talked about the need to develop enterprise education to encourage a business ethos and to encourage young people to consider careers in the engineering industry and in industry as a whole. Indeed, careers education in schools sometimes steers youngsters away from those areas.

The Department of Education presented the Committee with a paper on careers education. I hope that the Minister and the Department will heed what industry is saying, which is that careers education needs an overhaul. I also hope that it accepts that there is a role for careers teachers and for parents in directing young people towards the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Representatives from Schrader Electronics Ltd told us that they invited careers teachers, parents and young people to the company to show them the great opportunities that were available. A departmental report states that engineering graduates tend to be placed in jobs that reflect their skills, and male engineering graduates tend to earn 28% more than arts graduates. Therefore there is also a financial reward. Students must be informed of those facts to steer them towards STEM subjects when they are making their choices. Perhaps the Minister will respond to that issue.

It is disappointing that the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service's review of the curriculum talked about developing regional strategies, similar to literacy and numeracy, to provide coherent and consistent levels of support across key areas of the education service such as special needs, Irish-medium, English as an additional language and behavioural support, yet there was no mention of science. Although the Programme for Government talks about promoting STEM subjects, the Department of Education is not placing sufficient emphasis on it. If we are to encourage young people to meet the needs of industry, they must be directed to the relevant subjects at the relevant time — long before they decide to make career choices at university or at further-education level.

The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service also talked about the importance of developing a qualification structure that was specifically designed for Northern Ireland's needs; therefore a curriculum at university level, as well as secondary level, must be considered.

I welcome the fact that we are moving towards more vocational GCSEs and A levels.

The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service also spoke about —

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): Go raibh maith agat, a

LeasCheann Comhairle. Sammy was on a roll — you should have allowed him to continue.

I support the motion. It is important that it is seen in the wider context of recent concerns regarding the skills base and the drive for economic development. The Chairperson of the Committee for Education highlighted that issue, particularly in the high-value-added sectors, such as engineering, manufacturing and technology.

During two recent debates, concern was expressed about the potential lack of suitably qualified persons to meet the growing demands of our indigenous industries. Although the motion focuses on primary and post-primary school level, the issue cannot be divorced from policy considerations at further and higher education level. Therefore I would like to make some points about the Committee for Employment and Learning's work and consideration in that field.

The Committee will soon present its first report to the Assembly on the Department for Employment and Learning's Training for Success programme, which is the key vehicle for the delivery of vocationally based training and apprenticeships. In 2007, the Training for Success programme replaced the Jobskills programme. I hope to report on our findings by the end of May. Some issues that are pertinent to this debate emerged during the Committee's consideration. We received positive and negative feedback on the first year's operation of the Training for Success programme. While giving evidence to the Committee on 16 January 2008, the regional chairperson of the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering, Manufacturing and Technology, David Hatton, highlighted major concerns about apprenticeships and manufacturing.

Mr Hatton stressed that recent sector surveys discovered that three-quarters of businesses reported difficulties with recruitment and that, more worryingly, those firms believed that the trends would continue.

4.15 pm

It was also stressed that despite the recent news on job losses, there are tremendous opportunities for skilled engineers and technicians, and that it is vital to establish appropriate skills training. The Chairperson of the Committee for Education mentioned electronics — under the correct conditions and with appropriate education and training, there is potential for expansion in that sector.

The Committee for Employment and Learning discovered that the engineering sector is concerned that companies may be tempted to relocate if they cannot source appropriate skills here. In addition, economic incentives to attract foreign investment will fail if the building blocks of skills are not in place.

I will not say much about the Committee's findings on the Training for Success programme until its final

report is released. However, it is fair to say that the Committee is concerned that current occupancy levels appear to be falling below the Executive's target of 10,000 apprentices in training by 2010. More worryingly, the balance is massively skewed towards level-2 apprenticeships, which currently comprise 93% of the total, while level-3 apprenticeships comprise only 7%. Although level-2 apprenticeships play an extremely important role in sectors such as food and drink, tourism, and hospitality, the Committee concurs with the engineering and technology sector that level 3 must be the basic requirement.

Some employers consider level 2 to be semi-skilled and, consequently, below their business requirements. Department for Employment and Learning figures — supplied to the Committee in April 2008 — reveal that only 16 young people were participating in level-3 apprenticeship training in the engineering and manufacturing technologies.

The wording of the motion mentions the important Further Education Means Business programme; and the Committee recently considered the further education curriculum consultation that derived from that programme. The Committee welcomes the programme's alignment with local economic needs. However, it is concerned that the SME structure of the economy is not adequately reflected by the further education sector's engagement with the workforce development forums and Sector Skills Council.

The Committee recommended that every effort be made to include that sector. Engagement with the sector may not be routine and may require intensive outreach work by colleges at local level. The Committee also recommended that local industry and business needs be critically assessed by experts to ensure —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. I must be fair to everyone.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Basil McCrea.

Ms S Ramsey: Does the Member want to finish my speech?

Mr B McCrea: I will gladly take an intervention if Ms Ramsey wants to finish.

This Government has placed the economy at the centre of the Programme for Government; however, do they understand what that entails? This is a debate in which Members will quote from the Leitch Report and the Tomlinson Report and in which researchers will have done all the work. Members will, undoubtedly, talk about the economic investment conference and the need to match rhetoric with delivery. If we were telling the Americans that our workforce was so good, how

can our education system be, apparently, so bad? That, surely, demonstrates incongruity.

The key questions that Members have to ask this Administration are: is it competent to deal with the matter, and will it do more than issue platitudes and exhortations to improve?

The Committee for Education hears evidence from teachers. We are all a product of our experience, and, for what it is worth, I have four A-levels — in maths, physics, chemistry and biology. I also have a degree in chemical engineering and a masters degree — with first-class honours — in information technology, and I am eager to discover Mr Storey's credentials.

Mr S Wilson: With those qualifications, why does the Member work in the Assembly and not in industry?

Mr B McCrea: I will ask a question straight back. Why do 30% of people with engineering degrees not go into engineering, but into commerce and finance, just as I did? Perhaps the Chairperson of the Committee for Education will tell us why 8% of graduate engineers are still unemployed after eight months. Perhaps he will also explain to the House why over 50% of engineering postgraduates in the United Kingdom do not come from this country. Why are those questions being asked? I know why, because I was there.

The issue comes back to two strategic questions for Northern Ireland. In recent years, our employment figures have soared, but our productivity has declined. For all intents and purposes, we have full employment, but 30% of our workforce is economically inactive. As the unions correctly point out, there is very little differential between the minimum wage and some of the benefits that people are claiming. The motivation to move people off benefits and into work is not what it ought to be, or what it is in other parts of this kingdom.

How should we meet those key challenges? We should, first of all, make it a priority to raise the average wage in this part of the world above 80% of the UK average. It should be brought up to at least 100%. That is a target that the Executive might wish to take on board, but it can only be achieved through improved productivity. We must focus on those areas that produce high gross value added (GVA) per employee. We must find a way to improve the private sector. Mr O'Dowd said to me recently that not everyone wants to go to university or to have a career in ICT. If that is so, he should tell those people that they are wrong. If they really want to get a better job, to get more money and to get out of poverty, they should apply themselves to the areas in which there is a demand.

There is a problem when it comes to encouraging people to take up engineering. Nathan Connolly said that at the age of 12 or 13:

"I was always around music, and like any other kid ... I wanted to be a rock star and play guitar."

Young people want to be pop stars, or footballers like David Healy or David Beckham. We must get young people to understand that engineering offers a way forward.

I could go on at some length, Mr Deputy Speaker. If I have checked the clock correctly, I have an extra minute. *[Interruption.]*

There is a danger in trying to educate some people, but that would not do in this place. The Engineering Technology Board has produced several reports that explain the most pressing problems. Parents are the biggest influences on their children. Teachers — not just careers teachers, but teachers of subjects — also have a big influence.

Did I get an extra minute for the intervention, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes; for the intervention.

Ms S Ramsey: Sammy.

Mr B McCrea: He has the suit for it.

We must encourage young people to understand that engineering offers a genuine way forward. We cannot do that by lecturing young people; we can do it by informing them. The Royal Academy of Engineering and the Engineering Technology Board, and other such bodies, are able to do that. The Minister of Education must tell the House how she intends to tackle the underperformance in communication. We must encourage people to do what is right for them, right for the country and right for us all.

Mrs M Bradley: Science, technology, engineering and mathematics — the STEM subjects, as they have become known — are essential to the development of science- and technology-based industries, in which we must excel if we are to compete in the global economy. The number of pupils taking STEM subjects has been falling over the past several years, and although that is an international trend in the US and Europe, that is no reason for us to be complacent.

Our competitors in the global economy now and in future, in countries such as India and China, are excelling in those fields. If we do not meet the challenge, we will simply not be in a position to compete. The opportunity still exists for us to reverse those trends and to be at the cutting edge of international competition, but we must grasp the opportunity now, while it still exists.

The prioritisation of science, technology, engineering and maths skills is a key measure that will support the aim for a knowledge-driven economy, based on higher-value-added sectors. In most emerging countries, growth remains solid, and activity in China, India and Russia is particularly striking. In that context, Northern Ireland must capture the benefits of global demand over the long term. As Sir David Varney reported,

many East Asian countries exhibit low labour costs. The challenge for Northern Ireland, and for many European economies, is to move up the value chain by improving skills, innovation and technology.

The STEM subjects should be an area of the curriculum that fires the students with the desire to enquire, to experiment, to learn, and to apply knowledge to solve problems and devise solutions. Throughout the education system, from primary to third level, we must encourage a gradual awareness that knowledge can be transformed — through research and development and experiment — into products that can be marketed and sold commercially.

We must link the STEM subjects with wealth creation and the various careers that go with them. That means that there must be a strong emphasis on the STEM subjects, not only in careers education, but through teachers' highlighting the career potential of those subjects throughout the education system.

At present, the majority of STEM-subject graduates go into the medical professions. The remainder go into the public sector and the private sector, in that order. There is a clear imbalance, which must be put right if we are to grow the private sector to the extent that is required. However, STEM subjects must be made more attractive to students, with an emphasis not only on knowledge, but on experimental application. The revised curriculum, with its emphasis on skills, should help in that respect. In some cases, the emphasis on health and safety in the laboratory has reduced students' involvement in experimentation, which is one of the chief motivational aspects of STEM.

We need curricular settings that integrate the components of STEM subjects, and there is a need to develop better links among schools, further-education students and industry. We must see where their work is leading, and each STEM-subject teacher must become a careers teacher in that respect by continually making links between the work in the classroom and work in the outside world. Links with local industry are particularly important in that respect, and although some schools have established good relations with local industries, there is plenty of potential for development in that area.

Although STEM subjects will be recognised under specialist-schools cohort 3, every school must be given a high priority in that area.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party also welcomes this constructive and timely motion. The question of how to match the education system to the needs of industry and commerce has been discussed many times, but it has never been more relevant, given the current economic climate. Our manufacturing companies are crying out for qualified people who have been suitably prepared for work. The current education system, with its emphasis on academic achievement and the pressure

to obtain a degree in something — almost anything, frankly — is failing to prepare students for work.

Those of us who were fortunate to hear the presentations that were made to the Education Committee by the education task force and Schrader Electronics Ltd, which Mr Sammy Wilson mentioned, heard at first hand about what is missing in the system and about the gap that has arisen between what is needed and what is provided.

The education task force highlighted several problems, including the need for pupils to move from primary education with an acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy and the need for greater emphasis on vocational subjects for post-16-year-old students. The task force also advocated the development of school partnerships across education sectors, and it highlighted the importance of further-education colleges in encouraging students to follow a path that has been regarded as second best for too long. Moreover, the task force demanded meaningful dialogue among the business, industry and education sectors on the skills agenda, and it suggested that a campaign should be directed at parents and children about the benefits of science, technology, engineering and maths, in line with the motion.

4.30 pm

The presentation from Schrader Electronics was directed at the practical shop-floor problems that the manufacturing industry now faces. Schrader is a very successful company, with a growing market and ambitious expansion plans. It employs about 1,000 people, and the intention is to raise that to 2,000 in the next two or three years because its product is about to become compulsory in the United States. The world is its oyster.

Although I am sure that there is competition out there, the company is in a very good position — except that it cannot get the staff to make the things. Fifty per cent of its current personnel are production staff and, of that number, 29% are immigrant workers, mostly Polish. Those are not minimum-wage jobs but well-paid, long-term ones, and our system is not producing enough suitably qualified people to fill them.

What happens if economic conditions in Poland improve, as is inevitable under the EEC guidance, and our migrant workers go home? We will have even more of a skills shortage and we will have the possibility that industry will follow the movement of labour, compounding the problem that we already face.

This is a good motion, and I have no doubt that it is in line with the thinking of both the Ministers. The days when a degree in a subject such as hairdressing or scholastic metaphysics, or, for that matter, human nature or surfing — and I mean on the water, not on the Internet, although that degree is available at Liverpool University — is more desirable than a useful vocational qualification with a practical application

must surely be at an end. As Northern Ireland moves forward under its own steam, it is essential that we encourage the necessary changes in direction.

If the Americans who were here last week for the investment conference decide to invest, they will be looking for practical skills, not wacky degrees. The warning signs are there for all of us to see, and we must take heed. Let us prepare young people for the real world with qualifications that mean something and will take them to sustainable and useful work. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Storey: I support the motion and welcome the fact that we have cross-party and cross-Committee support today in the House. I also have to say that I am sad that Mr Basil McCrea is not in the Chamber. He made some comments in my direction earlier, and I suppose, given the problems that the BBC has had recently with its voting system, no doubt there was a problem again at the weekend, as he unfortunately seemed to rise to the top of that particular poll — which just proves that yet again the BBC systems are in failure.

Mr Weir: Does the Member also believe that Mr McCrea could still be Nancy as well?

Mr Storey: It is quite possible.

Turning to matters of substance, which Mr McCrea probably knows little about, last week's US/Northern Ireland investment conference could be the beginning of an unprecedented period of investment in Northern Ireland if we can see it as the impetus for change and the milestone for taking note of the valuable findings of two reports, which should not be ignored as we seek to build on the success of the conference.

One of those reports was referred to earlier; I refer to the education task force report compiled by teachers, industrialists and engineers from higher education. It has characterised our society as risk averse, and notes that there is little support or encouragement for entrepreneurial activities and the stimulation of interest in science and engineering. The report is quite scathing on the potential that will never come to light and the consequences for a society that the report depicts as heavily reliant on public-sector employment.

The other report, from the Federation of Small Businesses, paints an equally gloomy picture of a Northern Ireland suffering from a skills deficit where there are clear barriers to growth. These are not images that fit well with the feel-good factor of last week's conference, and that is not the picture that we want potential American or other investors to take back from their fact-finding excursions.

There is one note of harmony in the two reports that should not be ignored. It is incumbent on the Minister of Education and the Minister for Employment and

Learning to respond effectively to it in order to reduce the risk of losing the momentum, which, in the long term, will ensure that Northern Ireland becomes and remains a venue for potential investors.

It is time for both Departments to use joined-up thinking and to develop a responsible, measurable strategy to stimulate and nurture the level of skills development that business and higher-education experts have identified as essential. This is a time for new partnerships and co-operation.

The Minister's obsession with equalising opportunities and her attempts to do away with academic selection have been a distraction for months; it is feared that she will throw the baby out with the bath water. The Minister is neglecting the core issue of the essential skills deficits in the primary sector; the Federation of Small Businesses report and the experts who produced the education task force report recognise that deficit. They have called on the Minister to refocus her attention on her responsibility to stimulate and support a greater interest in science, technology, mathematics and engineering at school level. That call echoes the Committee for Education's identification as a major problem of the Minister's persistent degeneration, degradation and downplaying of the education system.

In the Senate Chamber during last week's investment conference, the Prime Minister paid tribute to the excellence of our education system. I welcome that tribute, unlike the Minister's continual "failure" mantra, which she uses as a cloak to attack academic selection. I would like the Minister of Education to praise Northern Ireland's invaluable, high-class education system. Unfortunately, at no time has the Education Minister referred to her essential task of making scientific and entrepreneurial skills a key focus of secondary education.

The essence of the argument is simple: the profile and operation of our education system must match our economic ambitions if we are to have a skills agenda that connects primary and secondary learners with the skills progression necessary to meet foreign investors' expectations. It is time for the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and for the Department of Education to merge thinking — if not their entire Departments. They must assist industry and business in formalising needs and in articulating demands. The Departments must also provide a system that will help schools and colleges to translate demands and requirements into educational goals. I support the motion.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to speak to the motion, which I proposed to the Committee after we had heard presentations from employers and from the education task force; those presentations sparked concerns about

local businesses' unmet needs. We heard concerns about businesses not being able to expand — or even being forced to relocate — in future. Such problems are due to the shortage of students studying STEM subjects and moving into the engineering field. We tabled the motion because of that shortage.

As other Members said, one of those presentations was made by a very successful engineering firm that does excellent work in the surrounding schools, universities and colleges; it attempts to attract people to the type of work that it offers and to grant young people ownership of their career path while pointing them in the right direction. That organisation, and others, works proactively with young people to provide them with relevant information and to point them towards labour market shortages.

Members mentioned the need to connect children to the world of work and to point them and their parents towards shortages in the economy. We must encourage children to take an interest in the STEM subjects at an early age; that would enable them to make wise subject choices. We want them to study subjects that will lead to meaningful employment in our economy, particularly in the engineering sector.

If we are to build a strong economy, we must encourage young people to work to its needs; otherwise we encourage them to follow a career path that could lead to a qualification in an area in which our economy cannot offer gainful employment. The Federation of Small Businesses has said that the provision of skills development for everyone will ensure a prosperous and sustainable economy. The investment conference to attract potential investors took place last Thursday, and if we are to live up to the promises made at it, we must gear our young people towards the needs of our economy.

I welcome the Chairperson's remarks that although we have called upon the Minister of Education to respond, this is not solely an educational issue and that there is a need for a partnership approach. We need business and Government to work together to develop a new skills strategy for the North developed on a cross-departmental basis that will embrace the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Input from the business community will be vital. The business sector and employers' organisations are vital to the future of our economy: who better to identify the skills necessary to ensure that we remain competitive?

We all need to come together to develop a world-class, skilled and competitive workforce. Some of the necessary work is being done through the various forums. I have already mentioned the proactive nature of one company, and I am sure that its example is

being followed by others. There are also progressive projects, such as business education partnerships, which bring together schoolchildren and local businesses. We need to build on those and ensure that there is consistency of approach across the North.

In the engineering sector, more than 50% of recruitment campaigns for engineers and technical staff have to be re-advertised to attract applicants. That shows that young people do not recognise that field of work as a viable option, and we need to do more to challenge that myth.

Much work has to be done to ensure that we grow a vibrant economy with a highly skilled workforce. We have shown our constituents that we are committed to creating a strong, vibrant economy. Let us ensure that we live up to the commitments in the Programme for Government. Go raibh maith agat.

Miss McIlveen: All Members will agree that there has been a shocking decline in the number of students taking STEM subjects at A level over the years. The seeds of disinterest in those subjects are sown at a much earlier age.

Much is being made about Northern Ireland's seeking to fight it out economically on the world's stage. However, we are still over-reliant on public-sector employment and on low-paid retail jobs. There is a lack of skills-based qualifications; an apparent obsession with professional-level jobs, such as accountancy and law; and a paucity of medium and large businesses.

Northern Ireland has always boasted about its well-educated and highly skilled workforce, and that is true for a proportion of our society. Every year, we produce a top level of academically successful students, which the Minister appears intent on removing. We also have a large number of pupils who leave school every year with inadequate reading and writing skills. Children should be leaving primary school with those basic skills. The issue was debated at length last year, and the Minister, for her snail-paced approach to dealing with it, is worthy of much more criticism than she receives currently.

In its 2006 survey, the Federation of Small Businesses highlighted the concerns of the businessmen of Northern Ireland at the skills deficit. Some 49% felt that Northern Ireland fell short of having the required basic IT skills, and 44% were concerned at the shortage of technical skills that met their business needs. The report of the education task force highlights interesting points, particularly about countries such as Finland and Taiwan. By taking a cross-departmental approach and input from the business sector, Governments are able to formulate plans to meet the needs of the business sector through education. That increases better-paid

employment and facilitates development of a sustainable economy.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel seeks to reduce Civil Service bureaucracy, but bureaucracy and regulation impede progress in many aspects of our society and that is no less true of education. Subjects, such as chemistry, thrived on practical experiments that made learning fun. If a subject is enjoyable, it will be attractive to young inquisitive minds. The fun has been taken out of those subjects by over-regulation.

Last year, I watched a television programme that took a group of GCSE pupils out of a modern classroom and back to a school of the 1950s. The children loved the practical side of the science subjects, and that had a particularly positive impact on the boys. Needless to say, girls must also be targeted.

Northern Ireland's public sector accounts for 61% of GDP; that, in itself, tells a story. We are turning into a country of paper-pushers, but our level of spending remains unchanged. We do not bring enough new money into the country. We can only rectify that by encouraging entrepreneurship and developing a highly skilled workforce with the right skills for a modern economy.

The US investment announced last week was welcome news to us all. However, I want Northern Ireland to produce its own technology-based companies, employing men and women from Northern Ireland who can become world leaders. We have fantastic companies, such as Randox Laboratories Ltd, based in County Antrim, which employs over 600 people, and Andor Technology PLC, based in Belfast, which produces goods sold in over 40 countries.

At Queen's University, the Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology (ECIT) does some fantastic work in research and development and in supporting local technology-based businesses and projects. We must build on our home-grown successes.

4.45 pm

We have seen difficulties before with outside investment. When the economic climate does not suit, investors will leave. However, by generating home-based companies, we can build a better economy in Northern Ireland. That, in part, will be achieved by appropriate education.

That does not mean that we remove academic-focused schools from the education map, as the Minister for Education envisages — it is a matter of complement in the schools' estate. Society needs all types of schools, which should be able to provide all types of skills. There must be an appropriate strategy to deal with education as a whole. Removing bits that are not liked for some faux-ideological reason is not

the way to a successful education system that will build our economy.

If we note the Minister's own pseudo-Marxist credentials, we are perhaps talking to the wrong person in relation to building a vibrant economy. However, I would like to think that she takes note of the political and economic realities, and appreciates the real benefits that a multi-skilled, literate and numerate population — including those who have received an academically focused education — can have for the future of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr K Robinson: I welcome the motion. It is timely and previous Members who have spoken have identified the reasons for that.

One of the primary purposes of an education system is to produce a workforce fit to drive and service a modern economy. That has been the driving force behind much of the good and commendable work that has been done over the past few years by the Department for Employment and Learning.

The document, 'Further Education Means Business' — the outline business plan for the Department for Employment and Learning — was developed from a report from this Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee. The Committee's report on education and training for industry in late 2002 sets out the guiding operational principles through which vocationally relevant education and training can be delivered by our further and higher education colleges.

I cannot emphasise enough how crucial it is that higher and further education is linked as closely as possibly with our secondary and primary-level education in this process. It is a continuum from the first day a pupil enters the primary school door to the last day that he or she leaves college or university.

Furthermore, I cannot emphasise too much the importance of prioritising industrial and job-related skills in our schools and colleges. Looking at the patterns of educational uptake in the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and maths — the schools and the Department of Education that oversees them have some way to go in catching up with the lead provided by DEL.

There has been a slight increase in the uptake of biology at A level; however, conversely, there has been a decrease in the uptake of chemistry and physics. Physics, in particular, is an important building block in many science-related careers, particularly those with higher rates of pay, and that deficiency needs to be addressed urgently. The number of students studying physics at GCSE level has marginally increased from 1,861 in 2002 to 1,933 in 2007. Therefore, that slight increase should correspond to an increase in uptake at A level. However, that has not yet occurred.

The quality of careers guidance in schools has long been a subject of heated debate, and has been unfavourably commented upon in the past. Steps have been taken by DEL to address that issue. Therefore, once again we are seeing the educational lead being taken by DEL and not by the Department of Education — a situation that really must change if we are to address the problem at its roots.

The proactive stance taken here by DEL is reflected in strategic objectives being realised by our universities. Up until now Queen's University has received honourable mentions — and rightly so. However, I must also congratulate the work that has been carried out by the University of Ulster at the different campuses around Northern Ireland.

The Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Peter Gregson, suggested that if Northern Ireland's economy is to survive and prosper in the global market place, highly qualified graduates are needed in the key areas of science and engineering — subjects that have, in recent years, shown a decline. As a member of the Russell Group of leading UK universities, Queen's has played a major role in initiatives to encourage students to enrol in those subject areas. That effort has paid off, and the university has recorded a higher increase, when compared to the national average, in student applications for areas such as chemistry and mathematics.

We want to see real action from the Department of Education. We do not want a Department that is being led up the garden path by its Minister on what appears to be a single focus — post-primary transfer — and little else. We need a Department that realises what industry is telling us with an increasingly frustrated voice. For instance, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has set out a five-point programme, which I commend to the Assembly. The CBI recommends that the brightest 40% of 14-year-olds should be directed automatically into separate physics, chemistry and biology GCSE courses, instead of the stripped-down science curriculum that is being studied by most.

The CBI also states that £120 million of new funding should be identified to pay for one-to-one careers advice at ages 14, 16 and 18, which will help to challenge the misconceptions about science and engineering.

The education task force was most impressive when it came to speak to the Education Committee. It noted that we have a relatively well-off, risk-averse society at one extreme, which will not encourage bright children to be entrepreneurial or to consider science and engineering. The task force stated that we produce too many students of law, dentistry and medicine.

Companies must also take further steps to encourage young people into careers. I commend the energy and vision that has been shown by Schrader Electronics

Ltd in my constituency of East Antrim, which has visited all types of schools in the area to try to change that perception.

Mr Hamilton: I congratulate the Chairman of the Education Committee and his Committee colleagues for tabling this important motion. The linkage between education and the economy is sometimes overlooked in our debates.

The CBI has been moved to state that there is a:

“mismatch between education provision and the needs of the economy.”

That provides us with something to note and to act on.

The dichotomy between the debate and last week’s successful investment conference has been mentioned. Today, Members have been complaining that our education system is not tooled appropriately for the economy. However, last week, we were selling Northern Ireland and our education system to Americans. I do not see a massive gulf or a huge problem. Our education system is one of our few competitive advantages in a globalised economy.

Last week, I was interested to hear our educational achievement being heralded as a selling point to the US delegates. In the Senate Chamber, we even heard the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, extolling Northern Ireland’s exam results at 16 and 18 and comparing them, favourably, to the rest of the United Kingdom. It is good to hear our Prime Minister doing that; it would also be good to hear our Education Minister do the same from time to time.

Despite our widely recognised and acknowledged high educational achievement, it is not unfair to say that, traditionally, our education system has not been tooled towards our economic needs. Business is let down because too much of the workforce lacks basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and, simultaneously, graduates are being churned out by universities here and elsewhere without some basic skills that are required for business. That is an unusual problem that we face.

The concentration of the motion and the debate on STEM subjects is correct, but one must look beyond the simple accumulation of qualifications. The basic building blocks for the long-term development of our economy in a positive direction can be set in place long before university, or even secondary school — it can be established in primary schools and, perhaps, pre-school education. Therefore, those who qualify in STEM subjects, or other subjects, can have the opportunity to work for other companies or set themselves up in business. That is just as important.

It is wrong to say that the attributes that make entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and Richard Branson tick can be taught in a classroom. However, teaching and the curriculum can be tailored to include topics,

projects, exercises and coursework that will instil in the pupil adaptable, transferable and versatile skills, attributes and behaviours, such as problem-solving, creativity, persuasiveness, planning, negotiating, decision-making, versatility and resourcefulness.

Those skills and attributes are obviously required in business, but would stand any student seeking any career in good stead.

It is not necessarily about entrepreneurship, but rather about having an enterprising attitude. It is about developing a culture of enterprise instead of one of dependency, and we all acknowledge that our country has lost its enterprising culture in recent times. There are many good examples from around the world of entrepreneurial skills and the culture of enterprise being taught in the classroom. I was struck by a project that a unit of Durham University has been working on with countries such as the Ukraine, Hungary, Poland and Latvia — all former bastions of communism. If those countries see the need to instil a culture of enterprise in children as early as at pre-school age, surely it could also be done in Northern Ireland. Similar programmes are in place in countries that are not too far from here — in Scotland, for example.

In conclusion, in the past, we have been a powerhouse of industry, known for punching well above our weight. The cost of labour gave us a competitive advantage in those days, mostly in heavy industries that are, sadly, by and large a thing of the past; something that I am aware of, as a representative for the Strangford constituency. Improving the education system in the way that the motion suggests is about maintaining our competitive advantage and ensuring that we do not end up in an economic wilderness in the future, but rather that our children will graduate into well-paid and highly skilled jobs.

Mr Newton: In supporting the motion, I want to make the small point that perhaps it should have included the words “inward investment” also. Addressing the needs of inward investment should be a part of what we are attempting to do, in order to help us attract such investment.

First of all, in our society, we must appreciate the work of the technician and the technologist as well as that of the doctor and the dentist. That is not to say that we do not need doctors and dentists, but, so often, our society sees a lot of virtue in the work of doctors, dentists and other such professions, and ignores the technician and the technologist. In many ways, this motion highlights the need for a review of the number of Departments. I believe that all the pieces needed to help us to deal with this issue are already in place, but they are not joined up. I hope that the points that I make will demonstrate that.

I have spent most of my business career in the development of job-specific training programmes, vocational qualifications and academic qualifications up to the level of foundation degrees. During a Question Time in this Chamber, I asked the Minister for Employment and Learning about a demand-led strategy, and received an assurance from him that he was implementing such a strategy, which would be based on the needs of employers, as identified by DEL. I believe that, along with the Executive, industry is seeking to play a positive role in the development of appropriate strategies and actions to ensure the provision of qualifications and the development of programmes to provide relevant qualifications to combat skills shortages, drive up the skills base and enhance the potential of the Executive to attract inward investment.

I want to comment on three areas. As has been mentioned, just over a year ago, the European Commission announced that it would be targeting the entrepreneurs of tomorrow by introducing a plan to make entrepreneurship a part of the school curriculum. Generally speaking, I am a Euro-sceptic, but in this instance, I think that the Commission got it right. Enhancing the role of education and promoting a business spirit in schools and universities has proven to be helpful in creating greater self-confidence among young people and making them think about the business world. Educating young people in entrepreneurship dramatically increases the start-up chances of self-employment in small- to medium-sized enterprises.

I note that approximately 20% of participants in European secondary schools who are involved in mini-company activities go on to create their own company.

5.00 pm

I advocate stronger links between our colleges and business. The Committee for Employment and Learning received an interesting presentation about the Lecturers Into Industry initiative, which I support. That initiative should be extended to include schoolteachers, and, at an increased level, to those who work in industry. Furthermore, businesspeople should also be allowed to get involved.

Each sector of industry and commerce is covered by a sector-skills council. Such councils are led by businesspeople and are required to develop sector-skills agreements, which are approved by DEL, Invest Northern Ireland and others who have an interest in the development of a strategy for the specific sectors. The sector-skills agreements are demand led and reflect the needs of industry. Through such agreements between industry sectors, Government bodies have the opportunity to meet the needs of industry, by creating, for example, sector-specific qualifications. Sector-skills agreements have been developed to get industry-training providers

working together to improve the performance and skills base of training and education.

As a result of the brain drain, Northern Ireland is losing its brightest and best. I welcome the fact that the Minister for Employment and Learning commissioned a study to investigate such issues. I acknowledge that the Minister has yet to report back to the Assembly on that study. I look forward to the outcome, which will serve as one strand in addressing the issue, and I especially look forward to the implementation phase of that report.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion, and I congratulate the Member for bringing it to the House.

It has been said that the Minister of Education is getting in a knot about selection and that she is fiddling on the shore while the truth is in the ocean beside her. That is not one of my colleague Sammy Wilson's comments, nor is it one of his opinions on or assessments of the Minister. Rather, it is an assessment made by a group of teachers from different sectors, industrialists and engineers from our universities. Therefore, others clearly have an opinion about the issue. That comment proves that change is required, and I am not talking about forms of academic selection.

It was not so long ago that I tabled a motion on apprenticeships, and I indicated that there was a severe skills shortage in the Province. The Minister for Employment and Learning listened, and he responded positively by beginning to make a series of changes that were required in order to meet the needs of the industrial sector. However, the issue is not entirely the responsibility of the Minister for Employment and Learning, hence today's motion.

Part of the solution to the problem lies with the Department of Education and, indeed, the Minister of Education. She has bemoaned the fact that children of 11 should not have to pass a test to decide their future or whether they should be academically successful or otherwise. So far, we have heard little or nothing of the alternative, and, indeed, I await Thursday's announcement with bated breath.

It is clear that people in all streams of education share that fear, and that is the reason that I urge the Minister to do what she said she would, which is to provide a forum for children of differing skills ability to concentrate on what they do best. The education of children who have a desire to work with engines should include a course that will foster that interest before they go for their apprenticeships.

As my colleague Simon Hamilton pointed out, we are fortunate that part of Bombardier Shorts is based in my constituency of Strangford. I have spoken to some of the third-year apprentices who work there. They told me that the first year of their apprenticeships was spent getting out of the mindset of school teaching and on being able to apply principles practically instead of

academically. Why should the first year of an apprenticeship be wasted in such a way when it is clear that the school should have provided a good basis for moving on?

The needs of the future economy of Northern Ireland are great, and it is clear that they must be met through our education system as a matter of urgency. It is even clearer that children must be taught the skills in science and maths that lend themselves to practical education. I implore the Minister to listen to our teachers and to our future employers. If she were to do so, we would be further along in delivering a framework that would allow each child to enjoy their job — academic or otherwise.

That is why I urge the Minister to spend some time assessing and meeting the needs of our children in science, technology, engineering and maths when it is clear that they have a desire and an ability to excel in such subjects.

Although I know that the Minister may hate the sound of it, she may have to consider streaming those who have the ability to help Northern Ireland progress in the industrial sector from those who simply do not have that ability.

Since that is not strictly academic selection, she might be able to swallow that pill and — in this instance — put the interests not only of our children but of the Province above any other agenda.

A strong emphasis is needed on the STEM subjects from primary school onwards, and it is clear that an urgent review is needed with interested bodies such as the Engineering Training Council. I urge the Minister to read the reports and assessments. She has a grave responsibility to ensure that our children can perform to the best of their abilities in their chosen fields; she must put a system in place that will help them to accomplish that.

In my constituency many young people are looking for opportunities. We must have a system that ensures that they can attain the qualifications that they need — that their full potential is achieved when they study at school or during their apprenticeships. The motion gives us that opportunity, and I implore the Minister to respond positively to it.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat. I welcome this debate, and I listened carefully to the many points that were made.

Chonaic mé an tsár-obair atá a dhéanamh inár scoileanna agus inár gcoláistí le cuidiú lenár n-aos óg dul i gcionnn an tsaol, agus molaim an obair sin.

I have seen at first hand the excellent work that is being done in our schools and colleges to help our young people to prepare for life and work, and I pay tribute to that work. I see enthusiasm in our schools

from principals, teachers and our young people; and also from industry and business to equip our young people with the life and work skills that they need.

I welcome the fact that the debate has moved on and that so many Members recognise the need to reform our education structures to ensure that they are fit for the twenty-first century and are capable of ensuring that all our young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential and to play their part in their community and in our economic development.

I attended many events during the investment conference last week; I was in Cultra and in Hillsborough, and I also attended the St Mary's University College event and many others, where I engaged with many potential investors. As the conference highlighted, we have a real opportunity to play our part as a dynamic and competitive economy in an increasingly global market.

Last Friday, after the St Mary's University College event, I had lunch with the New York City Comptroller at An Chultúrlann on the Falls Road. Two issues were highlighted: first, we need a dynamic economy with flexible and creative thinking skills; secondly, we need an equal economy. Equality has to be a part of our competitive economy; the best economy is one that is equal.

Education is central to the vision that we all have for the future, and I am determined that that will play its full part. Many of the North Americans to whom I spoke mentioned the importance of education.

The investment conference and recent reports on skills shortages highlight various issues, but the two issues that I will respond to are the need to enable our young people to learn the skills that they need for a modern economy; and the need to ensure that we tackle the deficits in basic skills. Both those issues are raised time and again by business, industry, and, particularly, the small to medium-sized enterprise sector.

Much good work is going on, and we have responded to the needs of business and the demands of the modern economy by reforming the curriculum that is taught in every school. In September 2007, a revised and dynamic curriculum was introduced into our schools. I am delighted that everybody now appears to share my view that that is the way forward. At the curriculum's heart, there is a focus on knowledge and on allowing young people to develop the key skills that they need to do well in life and at work; the key skills that our economy needs, such as critical thinking, team building, building relationships, problem solving, making informed choices, and becoming independent learners.

Díríonn an curaclam nua ar foghlaim don saol agus don obair, agus, tríd seo, cuidíonn sé le daoine óga tuiscint níos fearr a fháil ar shaol na hoibre; cuidíonn sé leo fosta na scoileanna agus na dearcthaí a fhorbairt a chuirfeas ar a gcumas a bheith ina bhfostaithe éifeachtacha agus le tnúth lena i bhfad níos mó ná sin.

The new curriculum also has a deliberate focus on learning for life and work and, through that, on helping young people to understand the world of work more fully and to develop some of the skills and attitudes that will enable them not just to perform as effective employees but to aspire much further.

Although much of the focus has been on science, engineering and technological skills, and rightly so, we must not lose sight of the fact that far too many young people are leaving school without the most fundamental skills — the ability to read and write and to use mathematical skills in everyday situations. If we are to meet the economic needs, we must start by raising the standards of literacy and numeracy, and I am totally committed to that.

Last year, around 5,000 children left primary school without achieving the expected levels in literacy and numeracy — 22% in English and just over 20% in maths. In GCSE exams last year, 47% — almost half of our young people — did not achieve at least a grade C pass in English and maths. Good passes in English — and in Irish for those children studying though Irish — and maths at GCSE level often unlock access to further and higher education and well-paid jobs. Too many pupils leave school with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, which leaves them ill-prepared for working life, and too many of those young people come from low-income families, the Travelling community and ethnic minority groups who have other barriers to face.

I have already established an independent task force to oversee our progress in raising levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, and I will introduce shortly the consultation on a new strategy designed to raise achievement and tackle underachievement. It will support and build on the focus inherent in the revised curriculum on helping young people to reach their full potential.

People seem to think that I do not value the academic excellence in our system: I do, and I will say it again just in case people do not understand what I have said. I value academic excellence. Nevertheless, I am concerned about the tail of underachievement.

My proposals for the wholesale reform of the post-primary system are also an essential part in transforming the educational outcomes of our young people. Our current system of grammar and non-grammar schooling is predicated on a 1947 concept of a blue- and white-collar world for which children needed to be prepared through either a purely academic or a purely vocational education — a view of the world that is rendered obsolete by the new realities of work.

I spoke to many North Americans during the different events last week, and they were amazed that an academic-selection system is still operating here. They did not support academic selection — regardless of which end of the political spectrum they represented.

Members referred to the world of business wanting us to change. I met members from the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry, and they have said publicly that the current selection system must be changed.

We are being presented with many imperatives to change the system, and key amongst those is the need to have an education system that promotes equality of opportunity and supports young people in their learning, that nurtures talent and does not brand young people as failures, and that is responsive to the needs of a modern, global economy and not built on tradition and privilege.

It is essential that we move away from a mindset where the true value of vocational courses is not fully recognised, or is seen by some as solely for non-academic or lower-ability pupils, and a mindset that is denying real opportunities to our young people and short-sighted when it comes to recognising the needs of our society and economy.

We need only look at the changes in the education system in the South of Ireland, and how that has supported the growth of the economy in the South of Ireland, to see the changes that are needed here now. We will not achieve progress if we deny any young person access to either academic excellence or vocational excellence, or a combination of both. That is why I am determined that every young person in our post-primary schools will have not just access but an entitlement — and I use that word deliberately — to the range of courses that can meet their needs and aspirations and lead them into further and higher education, training and employment. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry if this is boring for some Members.

By 2013, all pupils will be guaranteed access to a broad range of courses — general or academic, and applied or vocational — through the entitlement framework, with at least 24 courses on offer when it comes to making choices at the age of 14, and at least 27 when it comes to post-GCSE choices at the age of 16. In both cases, at least one third must be general, and at least one third must be applied. That requirement reflects the fact that our economy needs many more young people with skills and talent in more applied areas.

5.15 pm

I am equally determined that access to a wider range of courses and pathways cannot be dependent on the size or type of school that a young person attends, or their geographical location. Through the work of the area-based planning groups that I have established, my Department will ensure that post-primary education is planned and provided for through a network of schools, all of which are successful, sustainable and vibrant, and linked closely with the communities they serve. We will ensure that pupils in every one of those schools

will have access to the full entitlement framework, either in their own school, through collaboration of their school with other local schools, or through collaboration with further education and other providers.

Young people must be able to see that the courses available to them will lead to interesting and stimulating careers. That will require schools to offer coherent packages of courses to support pupils' progression to further education, training or employment, and I welcome the comments made by representatives in those areas. It will also require the provision of flexible and responsive careers education. My Department is already working alongside the Department for Employment and Learning to finalise a strategy to deliver high-quality careers education, information and advice. The overall objective of the strategy will be to enable learners to become more effective career decision-makers, successfully empowered to manage their own career development confidently. The process of finalising the strategy has been helped and has been informed by the large number of responses to the earlier consultation on the draft strategy. I am grateful to all those who took the time to respond. Go raibh maith agaibh. My Department hopes to be in a position to publish a strategy by the summer, and to move swiftly to implementation and action.

There has been much talk about the needs of business and the economy. In all of our work in education, we must never lose sight of the importance of input from employers, and the necessity of strengthening links between business and education. I hear increasingly from business and industry that they stand ready to play their part. The key challenge now must be to harness that willingness in a way that delivers results.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom labhairt go háirithe faoin eolaíocht, faoin teicneolaíocht, faoin oideachas agus faoin mhatamaitic san fhís atá agam don oideachas anseo. Tá mé tiomanta go hiomlán do chinntiú go soláthraíonn ár gcóras oideachais dár ndaoine óga agus dár n-eacnamaíocht.

I want to turn more specifically to the role of science, technology, engineering and maths subjects in my vision for education here. I must declare an interest; my father was a civil engineer; three of my sisters are teachers, focusing on maths, and my brothers were involved in architecture and engineering. In our house, engineering and maths were very important subjects. It is part of the vision that I have for education here. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that our education system delivers for our young people and for our economy; that no one is denied their education entitlements, and that we promote excellence — academic excellence and vocational excellence for all, across our education system. We must make science stimulating. I was at the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition in Dublin, with many of the schools from the North of Ireland, and I think it is essential that we participate

more in events like that, because it does make science, technology, maths and engineering stimulating for our young people.

The revised curriculum creates new opportunities for teachers to present those subjects in ways that appeal to young people and that catch their imagination. My Department's efforts to raise standards in literacy and numeracy will ensure that young people are not turned off maths.

The entitlement framework offers a greater breadth and balance of courses which, coupled with high-quality careers and educational advice, will enable many more young people to make the leap into STEM-related areas at age 14 and 16.

I agree with what Ken Robinson said about our primary and post-primary schools. I have seen some really interesting and stimulating courses involving collaboration between post-primary schools and post-14 further education colleges. I want to see more of that. It is good for our young people to move from the world of school for a short time to attend courses in further education colleges.

I am open to taking additional steps to promote STEM subjects. That is why my Department, with the Department for Employment and Learning, has initiated a review of science, technology, engineering and maths. That review reflects the fact that we are experiencing a reduction in the number of students who undertake STEM-related subjects. Any fall in the demand for science, technology, engineering and maths subjects should concern us all.

I have met the head of the review, Dr Hugh Cormican, a founder and managing director of Andor Technology. His team also comprises representatives from business, Government and academia, and is expected to produce its report in the summer. Sir Reg Empey and I will carefully consider those findings and recommendations and decide how to translate them into action.

I want to see many more young people doing well in maths and taking science subjects through to GCSE and A level, or equivalent. I further contend that modern languages are an increasingly important requirement in building a competitive, outward-looking economy. Perhaps we should expand STEM by adding an L on the end.

Regardless of how well schools collaborate or how many courses they offer, we will not make the necessary progress without changing attitudes. We all have a role to play in doing that. Too often, it is expected that only our brightest pupils can excel in science or maths. Too often, those brightest pupils are steered away from industry and enterprise towards safe jobs, frequently in the public sector. We must do more; we must learn from the South of Ireland about how to improve

educationally and how to promote careers in the science and technology sectors.

Business must play its part by showcasing opportunities for stimulating and rewarding careers, by taking pride in being employers who promote equality of opportunity and reward commitment, and by providing young people with quality work-experience opportunities that can whet appetites and foster aspirations.

The motion calls on me to bring forward proposals that are complementary to those that are being advanced by DEL and that are designed to increase skills and career choices in science, technology, engineering and maths, geared towards our primary and post-primary school children, and that will address the future needs of our economy.

My reform programme will deliver exactly what the Education Committee wants, not just by increasing skills and career choices in science, technology, engineering and maths, but by ensuring that all young people — whatever their interests and aptitudes — have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential, and to play a full part in the development of the economy on this island, as well as developing our society and community.

The challenge is to celebrate the excellence in our system while, collectively, taking responsibility for the children whom our system is failing. A bright future with unique opportunities lies ahead. Let us all play our role in it. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Bhí díospóireacht an-suimiúil againn inniu. Sílim gur labhair thart faoi dheich gComhalta, agus bhí gach Comhalta a labhair ar aon intinn faoin bhealach chun tosaigh ar an cheist seo.

We have had a very interesting debate involving 12 Members, if one includes the Minister and me. Generally speaking, there was a high degree of agreement on the issue.

The Chairman of the Committee for Education, Mr Sammy Wilson, proposed the motion. He highlighted the difficulties that local industries face in recruiting people to fill engineering and technical vacancies.

Quite a few Members — Mary Bradley, Michelle O'Neill, Trevor Lunn, Mervyn Storey, Ken Robinson and Sammy Wilson — mentioned the education task force's report and reiterated some of its points. They mentioned the need for meaningful dialogue among business, industry and education, particularly on the skills agenda.

Several Members emphasised that, at present, Northern Ireland's education-supply side delivers with little reference to the needs of society and the economy. In other words, it prepares students for jobs that do not exist, instead of for jobs that do. As several Members pointed out, those jobs are being filled by people who are not local.

Mr Lunn mentioned the fact that the business-demand side must define and articulate its needs, and how those needs should be met. Simply to say that needs exist is not adequate — business must explain what those needs are and how they can be met.

Several Members mentioned the need for greater emphasis on business and vocational courses in the curriculum, and that practical careers advice is needed for the promotion of STEM subjects, which featured quite often in the debate. Many Members, and the Minister, referred to the decline in numbers of students taking those subjects and called for measures to be introduced to increase their uptake. Several Members referred to the fact that current practice in schools means that STEM subjects are not presented as attractively as they had been previously. In some cases, stringent health and safety rules restrict the amount of experimentation in which pupils can be involved. The hands-on, experimental aspect is what motivates pupils to continue to study those subjects. The various components of STEM subjects must be integrated and links must be developed among schools, further-education colleges and industry.

The task force's report highlighted the need for all children to reach a clearly defined level of functional communication, both oral and written, in English or Irish, and the need for a similar level of numeracy. In her response, the Minister detailed her proposed actions to deal with literacy and numeracy problems. A new literacy and numeracy strategy has been developed and a task force created. However, the Assembly is aware from experience that task forces have been set up to deal with that problem, but have not delivered success. In fact, the Public Accounts Committee has criticised them for their failure to deliver what they set out to achieve. I wonder whether more investment in primary schools should be considered. The Minister mentioned the low levels of attainment in GCSE English — more than 45% of pupils do not achieve a grade C or better. Often, by the time that children reach secondary school, their literacy and numeracy problems are, to some extent, embedded. Remediation has only limited success.

If we consider the difference between the levels of funding for primary schools and secondary schools, a more effective way in which to deal with literacy and numeracy problems may be to improve funding for primary schools. Teacher to pupil ratios, for example, could be brought to a level at which teachers could tackle, individually, students' literacy and numeracy problems.

5.30 pm

I return once again to the report of the education task force. One of its key elements was the need to develop a qualification structure in Northern Ireland designed specifically for the area, but which would also be acceptable elsewhere.

Sue Ramsey, Chairperson of the Employment and Learning Committee, provided a useful contribution. It

is good to see that type of co-operation between Committees. Sue Ramsey and Ken Robinson agreed that education is a continuum: from pre-school level, to primary, to post-primary, to further education, through to higher education. An approach to educational challenges must be made on that basis.

Sue Ramsey mentioned the lack of skills and how that had impacted on the ability to secure foreign direct investment. She also referred to the disparity between level 2 and 3 apprenticeships, with only 7% of trainees participating at level 3.

Basil McCrea referred to a decline in Northern Ireland's productivity and the need to improve the private sector. He also mentioned the need to raise the average wage here. He concluded by saying that the promotion of engineering offers the way forward. He asked the Minister directly how she would tackle the failure of communication in promoting engineering.

Several Members — Mervyn Storey, Michelle O'Neill, Mary Bradley and Michelle McIlveen — agreed that there must be a joined-up strategy on the issue among Government Departments, business, the Executive, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and industry.

The decline in the uptake of STEM subjects, which I have already dealt with, was mentioned by a number of other Members, including Mervyn Storey, Mary Bradley and Michelle McIlveen.

Although the Minister expressed some sympathy with the sentiment expressed in the motion, she failed to respond to the motion in a way that would satisfy many of the Members who spoke today, including Michelle O'Neill — a Member from her party. Michelle O'Neill said she proposed the motion at the Education Committee. Perhaps she should have discussed it in some detail with the Minister before she proposed it or before the Minister made her speech here today, because in my view the Minister did not respond to the issues raised in the motion.

The motion called for specific action on a specific subject, whereas the Minister believes that her reform programmes will deliver on the motion. However, most of the Members who spoke today were in agreement that specific action must be taken to tackle the skills shortage and to improve the uptake of STEM subjects.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the growing needs for our indigenous economy, with particular reference to the engineering sector, and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward proposals, complementary to the Department for Employment and Learning strategy 'Further Education Means Business' and the Programme for Government objective under PSA 2 to "increase skills and career choices in science, technology, engineering and maths (stem) subjects", geared towards our primary and post-primary school children that will address the future needs of our economy.

Adjourned at 5.34 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 13 May 2008

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

Spamont Car Bomb

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mrs Arlene Foster has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria that are set out in Standing Order 23A. As this is the first occasion on which such a statement has been made, I shall outline the procedure that will be followed. I shall call Mrs Foster to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I shall then call a Member from each of the other parties, as agreed with Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes to speak on the matter. There will be no opportunity for interventions, for questions or for a vote on the matter. I shall not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mrs Foster: Under Standing Order 23A, "Matters of the Day", I wish to make a brief statement. Last night, a serious incident occurred in the village of Spamont. A young police officer, who was making his way to his work in Fermanagh to serve and protect — the motto of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) — the community in that county, was targeted in a heinous way, when a booby-trap bomb was placed under his car. This morning, I was told by the divisional commander that the officer is fortunate to be alive and that he probably owes his life to quick-thinking members of the public who bravely pulled him from the burning vehicle.

Words cannot convey my disgust, and that of my party, at last night's events. I ask Members from every side of the House to join us in condemning last night's actions; to empathise with the officer and his family; to commend the people who assisted the officer after the bomb exploded; to call on those who have information to bring it to the police; and to send a clear message from this place that the people of Northern Ireland will not tolerate that sort of despicable behaviour from such societal deviants.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her statement, to which I add my voice. I planned to speak about the matter later, during the Final Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. I endorse the statement that is to be released from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the comments that Pat Doherty, the MP for the area, made this morning.

Therefore, on behalf of my party, I condemn that act in the strongest possible terms. Bearing in mind the subject of the debate later today, let there be no more victims. The establishment of a commission for victims and survivors is an attempt to bring closure for such people, and, in such circumstances, the last thing we need is more victims.

Although dangerous, the individuals and groups responsible for such attacks are tiny in number. They have no support in the community or anywhere in Ireland, and they are attempting to bring us back to the past. They will fail, and their threats against the police, politicians and others will fail. Whatever their aims, the perpetrators are practicing dinosaur politics — everyone else is moving forward while they are attempting to move back.

I also wish to praise the people who helped the injured policeman and, through their prompt actions, possibly saved his life.

I add to Arlene Foster's request by saying that anyone with information should bring it to the PSNI. Furthermore, I extend our sympathy to the policeman and his family. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Kennedy: I add my voice in unreservedly condemning — in the strongest possible terms — last night's murderous attack in Spamont, County Tyrone, on a young PSNI officer who was making every effort to serve the local community, particularly in County Fermanagh. It is a great relief that he was rescued from the car, and I pay tribute to those who gave assistance. I wish the officer a speedy and full recovery, and I extend good wishes to his family and colleagues.

By carrying out his duty and serving his community, that officer is, along with his colleagues, making a positive contribution to society, which contrasts sharply with the actions of the perpetrators, who have no place in decent society and want to bring us back to the past.

I join with others in encouraging members of the local community — who are equally shocked and distressed about the nature of the attack — to come forward and help the PSNI in order that those responsible can be made amenable to prosecution. The technical nature of the bomb, which is of a particularly dangerous type, is a worrying departure, and I hope that, with the local community's assistance, the PSNI will gather enough information to bring those responsible to book.

I pay tribute to local community representatives — especially my colleague councillor Derek Hussey — who are showing leadership and ensuring that the community remains stable and calm. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that communities in Northern Ireland do not support such actions, and it wishes them never to happen again.

Mrs D Kelly: I am grateful to Mrs Foster for the opportunity to speak about this matter. On behalf of the SDLP, I say that that attack was a cowardly and despicable attempt to intimidate police officers from carrying out their duties to the community. It was also an attempt to intimidate the wider public; however, those efforts will be in vain, and that is demonstrated each time the PSNI run a recruitment competition, when thousands of young people — both Catholic and Protestant — apply for a dwindling number of posts. Evidently, the community supports the police.

Furthermore, I wish to make it absolutely clear that there was never a mandate from the Catholic, nationalist community for violent attacks on police officers or any other member of the community. Indeed, it was heartening to learn that a member of the public came to the officer's assistance and saved him from further injury, and I join with others in wishing the officer a speedy recovery.

The Assembly's condemnation of the attack sends the message that the perpetrators of such actions have no place in our society. Unlike police officers, those people have no support, no agenda and no future. I also ask anyone who has information about this terrible attack to contact the PSNI to ensure that justice is served.

Mr Ford: I also thank Mrs Foster for raising the matter. On behalf of my party and my Assembly group, I join those Members who condemned this dreadful act of attempted murder and intimidation of a police officer. I express my sympathy to the officer, his family, his friends and his colleagues in the Police Service. It is also important that we commend the bravery of those civilians who saved the police officer from an even worse fate. Their actions show how the community responds to such attacks on the Police Service and how little support the perpetrators of such actions have. The Chief Constable summed that up eloquently this morning when he said that such acts achieved nothing except to inflict pain on the victims.

The best thing that Members can do is to encourage anyone who can assist the police in any way to do so. We must also concentrate on our responsibilities to develop the political institutions to provide good government for all the people of Northern Ireland and to work actively to promote the type of shared future that will make the perpetrators of such an attack even less significant.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank Members for those sentiments, which, I am sure, are shared throughout the wider community.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I acknowledge your ruling, and I have no trouble accepting it. However, I would be failing in my duty as the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures if I did not say that one intention of the new Standing Order was to give Members of the constituency concerned the opportunity to comment on matters such as this. I am disappointed that that did not happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee will, undoubtedly, review that. The main purpose of using that Standing Order was to allow Members to express their sympathy to the police officer and to assure him, and all his colleagues, that they have our total support. The issue that the Member raised can be addressed when the Speaker returns.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is the Final Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. I call the junior Minister Mr Gerry Kelly.

I apologise to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I have received notice from the Minister that she wishes to make a statement on the outcome of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on the ninth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the agriculture sector, which was held at the Enniskillen campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise on Wednesday 30 April 2008. At that meeting, the Executive were represented by the Minister of the Environment, Arlene Foster, and by me. The Irish Government were represented by Mary Coughlan TD, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and Éamon Ó Cuív TD, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. This statement has been agreed with Minister Foster.

The Council noted progress on the activities in the draft all-island animal health and welfare strategy, including: agreement on a common chapter in the respective epizootic contingency plans for foot-and-mouth disease, with common chapters for avian influenza and bluetongue to follow; ongoing development of a report on the potential for joint data sharing, which is expected to be completed by June 2008; continuing examination of the feasibility of a joint approach to the electronic identification of sheep; the development of common approaches to sheep scrapie genotyping; and the development of a common approach to salmonella in line with an EU baseline report, which is due to be published in May 2008.

The Council approved further measures to progress the all-island approach to Aujeszky's disease in pigs and, in conjunction with respective food safety standards agencies, consideration of the hygiene package on the transmission of food-chain information with animals going to slaughter and of the feasibility and priority of an all-island approach to Trichinella in pigs.

The Council also noted plans for consultation and a future cross-border event with key agriculture stakeholders from both jurisdictions to discuss the all-island strategic approach.

On the matter of plant health, the Council noted that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has developed a draft plant health strategy which includes a section on North/South co-operation. This is consistent with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food plant health strategies. The Council also recognised the need to develop a more strategic approach to cross-border co-operation on plant health and pesticide matters, and agreed to establish a steering group to identify areas of mutual interest in the plant health and pesticide areas.

The Council had a broad, wide-ranging discussion on issues of common concern regarding the EU common agricultural policy (CAP). It noted recent CAP reforms — in particular, the significant simplification of the single farm payment scheme. Ministers noted the contents of the CAP health check communication from the European Commission, along with conclusions from the European Council. Ministers requested that officials remain in close contact over CAP issues.

The Council received a presentation on cross-border rural development. This centred on an innovative and strategic approach to collaboration and communication on rural development programmes. This project is aimed at fostering improved community relations in remote rural areas and complementing the economic regeneration of disadvantaged cross-border regions.

Ministers noted the development of proposals for a rural enabler project for submission to the Peace III programme. This project aims to bring together people from both traditions, and migrants, to increase understanding and to address issues of sectarianism and racism in a rural context.

The Council also considered a cross-border project under INTERREG IVa to promote tailored rural development initiatives for a number of the most disadvantaged rural regions. The Council agreed that DARD and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs should continue to discuss other aspects of co-operation that would benefit rural communities across the region.

The Council agreed that its next meeting in the agriculture sectoral format would take place in autumn 2008. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Willie Clarke.

I am getting things really badly wrong this morning. Mr Tom Elliott.

10.45 am

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Elliott): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In being asked to

speak first today, I did not expect to be changing parties as well. *[Interruption.]* If I was in a different party I might consider that.

I thank the Minister for her statement and recognise the points which she has raised. I look forward to seeing the details of these deliberations when the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) approaches the Committee on these matters, particularly the approved measures relating to Aujeszky's disease in pigs. The Committee also looks forward to the Minister's attendance at its meeting this afternoon, where we will be apprised of the enhanced controls to prevent the spread of bluetongue in Northern Ireland.

The Committee welcomes vaccination in England as a positive move against the spread of this disease, and asks farmers not to import cattle and sheep to Northern Ireland until further notice. Has the Minister had any discussion with her counterparts in the South on the possibility of bluetongue's arriving in the Republic of Ireland? How would that situation be dealt with by the Northern Ireland officials?

The Minister has identified a number of cross-border rural development and other all-Ireland strategies. Can she direct me to the section of her statement that deals with the strategies for saving the Northern Ireland pig sector, or indeed the red meat sector? Where are the strategies for protecting the Northern Ireland poultry industry and for action on fuel prices across the Province? Where is the welfare payment for Northern Ireland farmers equivalent to what their counterparts receive in the Republic, and where is the level playing field within the industry?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I welcome the Deputy Chairperson's comments on the progress that has been made. I look forward to the Committee meeting this afternoon, where I will offer further details on the development of a strategy on bluetongue vaccination. Although bluetongue was mentioned and discussed at the North-South Ministerial Council meeting, that was around an island-wide approach as opposed to a specific one.

An outbreak of bluetongue in Louth would have implications for people in south Armagh. The nature of the disease means that we must consider dealing with it on an all-Ireland basis. Our response would depend on the location of the outbreak in the South. As we have done previously, we would liaise closely with our colleagues in the South, and we would then consider whether restrictions should apply in the North. Much depends on geography, and on where the first incursion occurs. Several options are available, depending on circumstances. Thus, good cross-border communication

on the bluetongue threat is taking place, as it does on many other issues.

The other issues that the Member mentioned were not discussed in any great detail at the NSMC meeting.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. What plans does she have to secure the free movement of animals on the island of Ireland? Will she also outline her plans for a rural White Paper, and will that paper have an all-island dimension?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I stated in discussions on the all-island animal health and welfare strategy, free movement of animals on the island of Ireland is one of my key priorities. Although sheep can be moved around the island of Ireland with relative ease — the industry has welcomed such arrangements — the free movement of cattle is more complex. That is partly down to the 10-year ban — lifted only a year ago — on the export of beef and live cattle from the North, and the European authorities' ongoing scrutiny of our control systems.

From my discussions with stakeholders, I am acutely aware of the apparent differences between North and South in our application of EU rules on trade in cattle since the lifting of the export ban. My aim is therefore to ensure, as far as possible, a level playing field. The all-island animal health and welfare strategy is the right vehicle to tackle the issue of the freer movement of cattle on the island. The rural White Paper was not discussed at the NSMC meeting.

Mr P J Bradley: I am glad that you did not call Dominic or Mary Bradley this morning, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My main question concerned bluetongue, which Mr Elliott has already raised. I look forward to the Minister's meeting with the Committee this afternoon.

Cross-border rural development has been mentioned, and the Narrow Water bridge project will slot nicely into the planned regeneration of cross-border regions. I welcome that project, although I know that the Minister cannot comment it.

Was the Treaty of Lisbon discussed at the meeting?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member is correct; I cannot comment on the Narrow Water bridge project, because that is the responsibility of my Executive colleague Conor Murphy. Some discussion about the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations took place at the NSMC meeting, but the Treaty of Lisbon did not feature.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her statement. She refers to the feasibility of adopting a joint approach to the electronic identification of sheep. Can she indicate

the timescale for such developments, given the existing problems with sheep identification?

The Minister said that the Department would:

“continue to discuss other aspects of co-operation that would benefit rural communities across the region.”

Can she give a flavour of those particular projects?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Local action groups will put forward their own plans. We want to offer them as much freedom as possible and we want to take a bottom-up approach to projects that will be included in the rural development programme. Therefore, I do not want to be too prescriptive or to pre-empt the outcome of that work.

Tagging and identification of sheep is very much a live issue. I am in discussions with the European Commission on issues that concern electronic ID. I intend to have a dedicated meeting on sheep ID with industry representatives shortly. The EU requires a blueprint by the end of 2009. We are developing our plans, and we are liaising with the South to ensure that the systems, North and South, are compatible and that our farmers are not disadvantaged in any way when sheep-identification measures are introduced.

Mr Irwin: As far as I am aware, in Northern Ireland, a programme to eradicate Aujeszky's disease in pigs is just about complete, while a programme is barely under way in the Republic of Ireland.

Is there not a danger that, in the Minister's all-Ireland approach, Northern Ireland will be held back with regard to this disease?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The industry has made good progress with DARD on Aujeszky's disease. We should soon be in a position to approach Brussels to seek recognition of our greatly improved Aujeszky's disease status. The South has also made good progress on the disease. Although parallel status may be sought from Brussels, each case will be judged on its merits, and trade will not be affected by a joint strategy. We could equally point to other animal disease issues. I am, therefore, confident that we can move forward on this matter to achieve the best outcome for the industry.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement, which is important with regard to co-operation. Will the Minister outline what positive outcomes co-operation has delivered, in particular on all-island sustainability and the energy strategy?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We are seeking a positive outcome on the energy issue. I have met Teagasc officials to ensure that our research programmes complement each other and do not duplicate work that has been done on both

parts of the island. However, renewable energy was not on the agenda at the NSMC meeting.

Mr T Clarke: I know that the Minister sometimes sees herself as the rural champion in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Will she accept that Orange Halls play a key and integral role in many communities? Have she or her counterparts considered funding for Orange Halls?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That issue did not come up at the NSMC meeting. Obviously, there has been funding for community halls across the sector through the last rural development programme.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister outline the positive, practical outcomes of co-operation on an all-Ireland basis with regard to animal health and World Trade Organization talks? Was there mention at the meeting, and are there concerns in the Agriculture Departments, North and South, about those talks?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: There have been a number of positive outcomes as a result of all-island co-operation on animal health. Those include the development of largely similar systems of sheep identification; co-operation on the exchange of data to facilitate trade in bovine animals after the lifting of the BSE export ban; a broad alignment of border control policies aimed at preventing the introduction of animal disease; co-operation on contingency planning for exotic disease outbreaks, including agreement on a common chapter in the respective epizootic contingency plans for foot-and-mouth disease; and initiation of draft common chapters for avian influenza and bluetongue. There is also agreement on a protocol on welfare during transport breaches, and co-operation on testing regimes for TB and brucellosis in border areas.

The strategic approach will enable the achievement of further positive outcomes over the next year, all of which provide for meeting the key aim of freer animal movements on the island.

The concern with the WTO is that Mandelson is negotiating away a lot of Europe's strengths, and it is of great concern, North and South, how we will be affected. The farmers' unions are particularly concerned, and the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) have held joint meetings with me and Mary Coughlan, the Agriculture Minister in the South, on these issues.

Farmers have also made their views clear on the Lisbon Treaty, which is also a cause for disquiet.

Mr Shannon: I want to comment on the issue of cross-border rural development.

The Minister talked about the council receiving a presentation on an innovative and strategic approach,

aimed at fostering improved community relations in remote rural areas and complementing the economic regeneration of certain regions. What is the Minister doing to assist isolated Protestant communities that have not yet availed of rural development funding? It is an important issue, and people are losing out.

11.00 am

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Pilot schemes have been introduced in some of those areas, and the Department has been involved in some single identity work. DARD and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are supporting the rural community network and the Irish Rural Link with an application under the “building positive relations at the local level” theme of Peace III.

The programme, which is known as the rural enabler, will seek to address issues of sectarianism and racism in rural areas, under the following headings: young people; flags and emblems; housing; interfaces; racism; community relations and community development; and rural institutions. The total estimated cost of the programme of activities is £2.4 million, North and South. Therefore, we are addressing the needs that the Member has articulated.

Lord Morrow: I, too, listened carefully to the Minister. What discussions has she had with the Minister of the Environment, Arlene Foster, to ensure that the Planning Service and the Environment and Heritage Service help to fast-track energy from waste projects? Furthermore, what are the Minister’s proposals for the pig, the poultry and the red-meat sectors? Does she have any proposals in relation to fuel costs?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The issue is topical and timely. Although it was not discussed specifically at last week’s meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, I am sure that I will discuss the issue with Minister Foster.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Final Stage

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): I beg to move

That the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill (NIA12/07) do now pass.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On 28 January 2008, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced their intention to appoint four victims’ commissioners. Furthermore, they announced that the establishment of such a commission would require a change in the legislation. We have now reached the penultimate stage in the enactment of that legislation.

There was some intense debate in the Chamber during the various stages of the Bill; however, the very fact that such a sensitive and often difficult subject was debated shows how far we have come in recent times. That in itself sends a message to such people as the perpetrators of last night’s attack that we are determined to forge ahead towards a new and better, peaceful, more prosperous future.

Everyone who contributed to the debate expressed support for the general thrust of what was being done to progress the Bill, although some Members did not always agree with the precise detail of it. There is a need to get the commission up and fully functioning, so that, at long last, victims and survivors can have a real, strong voice — a voice that, surely, they deserve. Therefore, I am pleased that we have reached this point, which is a milestone for victims and survivors. I hope that, at some stage, we can look back and realise that this was a defining moment for those in our society on whom the impact of the events of the past four decades has been greatest.

During the Bill’s passage, we listened carefully to Members’ concerns, and we gave due and careful consideration to the amendments that were tabled. The Bill, as it now stands, is a genuine effort to reflect, as far as is practicable, the wide-ranging debate that took place. During its various stages, the First Minister and deputy First Minister were criticised for delaying the progress of the Bill. Accelerated passage was sought, and the process took longer than desired. The issues involved, however, are important, and it would have been ill-advised not to give full consideration to the concerns that were raised. Therefore, I make no apology for taking time to get the Bill right.

This Administration is delivering for victims and survivors as promised, through the Bill and through the resources that have been secured for victims and survivors.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the Bill, and I am grateful that the priority and focus of the debate has been on meeting the needs of victims and survivors. Over the past weeks, there has been much debate; I hope that we are closer to the establishment of the victims' commission, which will offer the wealth of experience, expertise and skills that are required to shape and deliver the important services that victims and survivors need.

The legislation will establish a commission to acknowledge and support ongoing efforts and to ensure that programmes are delivered directly to victims and survivors, either by individuals or victims' and survivors' groups. I hope that those groups will be guaranteed the secure funding that is required to continue their worthwhile programmes. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: The SDLP is mindful that today's Final Stage will amend the existing legislation — the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 — to create a commission. Legislation already exists for the creation and appointment of a Victims' Commissioner. The SDLP has stated on record that its preferred option was, in the first instance, the appointment of a single Victims' Commissioner. That, clearly, will not happen.

Along with other parties, we sought to amend the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill. The amendments were rejected, and that remains a matter of concern for the SDLP. Therefore, we cannot support the Bill. However, we are mindful of the need to make progress and, therefore, we will not vote against the legislation today. It continues to be a matter of serious disappointment that the Bill has been handled with such hypocrisy and dishonesty. Despite the rhetoric, the additional appointments and the associated costs, the Assembly has missed the opportunity to give the commission the powers it requires to support victims effectively. That gives the lie to the self-righteous public grandstanding that we have witnessed.

During his contributions to the debate, junior Minister Jeffrey Donaldson challenged my colleague Mark Durkan for not seeking to amend the Bill at Westminster. That is further hypocrisy, because there was no Bill at Westminster — it was an Order in Council, which, as the junior Minister knows, cannot be amended. Also, Mark Durkan questioned the commission's authority at the Committee Stage of that Order on 1 November 2006. He said:

"It is one thing for the commissioner to be able to give advice, but there are issues about whether the victims commissioner will be able to get the quality of attention and response from Departments that the Commissioner for Children and Young People gets. We also need to address that in the future."

More importantly, during last week's debate on the proposed amendments, junior Minister Donaldson compared the victims' commission with the Equality

Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, in an attempt to defend his position on the number of commissioners. That highlighted other disparities that he does not want to rectify. The onus is on the junior Minister and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain why the victims' commission — despite the Victims' Commissioners' receiving an enormous salary, compared with other commissioners — should have such restricted powers.

The powers that the SDLP advocated would have given the commission a legal basis to pursue victims' interests with the vigour and authority, consistent with internationally defined standards. Without the inclusion of those principles, the commissioners' ability to make a difference will be limited. I expected it from the DUP, but the manner of the Bill's passage exposes a side of Sinn Féin that undermines that party's stated commitment to human rights and equality. It is my view — and that of the SDLP — that victims' interests remain prejudiced by the lack of consensus and failure of leadership in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Ford: In moving the Final Stage of the Bill, Mr Kelly said that everyone who had participated in the debate agreed with the general thrust of the Bill. Where has Mr Kelly been during the past weeks? It is absolutely clear that a significant section of the House does not agree with the general thrust of the Bill.

Three parties in this House made it clear that an existing Order provided for the establishment of a commissioner. That was what should have happened, and it was what the junior Minister Mr Kelly and his colleagues were planning to do, until they failed to agree on an appointment. It was then that we had the back-pedalling, and the sad stories of the people who had missed their Christmas pudding. They failed to fulfil their responsibility and their stated aim, which was to appoint a Victims' Commissioner before the summer recess of 2007. That was what they told us they would do, and now, virtually a year later, they are still desperately trying to cover their traces.

Let us not have any of that nonsense about Members of this House being in agreement on this issue. They may agree that we wish to ensure that the victims are properly provided for and cared for, and that the services that they need are made available. However, to suggest that there is any agreement on the thrust of the Bill is to misrepresent totally the view of the House, or, at least, a significant section of it.

The junior Minister Mr Kelly was rarely in the Chamber for the debates on the Bill. It is, at least, pleasant to see that three of the four Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Ministers have made it to the Chamber for the Bill's

Final Stage. However, where were they during the serious discussions, when we rarely saw more than one of the four of them, except, of course, when they all arrived with their embarrassed colleagues who had remained outside the Chamber, to vote down any sensible amendments?

How can junior Minister Kelly say that OFMDFM gave its “full consideration” to the concerns that were raised? What he calls “full consideration” amounted to four weeks of discussions between the DUP and Sinn Féin to try to resolve the complete anomalies in their approach, which were exposed by the fact that reasonable amendments were tabled from this side of the House. Let us, at least, accept the reality that this is, and remains, a flawed Bill. It is the result of a flawed process. All that is happening in the Chamber is that the DUP/Sinn Féin steamroller is rolling over everyone else, though, in truth, it is more the case that Sinn Féin is steamrolling the DUP Back-Benchers into submission until they are required to come in and vote.

There has been an absence of participation. Can you imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, during discussions about the needs of victims in this Chamber, circumstances in which DUP Back-Benchers would be as silent as they have been? That is an indication of their total embarrassment. However much junior Minister Donaldson may smile, the fact that not one of his colleagues is down to speak in this debate is a clear indication of that position.

Mr Shannon: I am going to speak.

Mr Ford: In that case I apologise. It is most unusual for an Alliance Party Member to be called before the first DUP contributor, Mr Deputy Speaker. The way in which you have routed today’s proceedings is a clear indication of the quality of the speeches.

We are left with a defective Bill. Those who have insisted on steamrolling the Bill through in its current form must show that they are going to provide for the needs of victims, and demonstrate that the commission will work, not just with the current four incumbents, but with the structures which, by statute, they have established for the future. I remain extremely doubtful whether that will be the case, although I wish the commissioners, if not the Ministers, all the best in the difficult task that they have.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Despite your efforts to get me involved, Mr Ford, I remain entirely neutral, as a Speaker should. I now call Mr Francie Molloy.

Mr Ford: Will the DUP speak?

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I am certain that the DUP and the other parties will be able to arrange their speaking rotas without Mr Ford’s help.

We have reached an important stage — the Final Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors

Bill. It is an incentive to go ahead and provide for victims and survivors. I welcome Dolores Kelly’s comment that her party would not hold up the process any further and not vote against the Bill. It is an indication that, having debated the issues — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ford: Is the Member saying specifically that Dolores Kelly was not going to hold up the process any further? That implies that, on some occasion, SDLP, Alliance Party or Ulster Unionist Members have held up the process so far. Perhaps the Member could elucidate when that was?

Mr Molloy: If the Member looks back two or three weeks, even he will realise what those parties have been up to. He should understand his own methods without the need for me to explain them to him.

It is important that we deal with the issue of victims and survivors today. We must take the opportunity to involve them in the process, so that they can begin to work with the commission and develop a strategy that will deal with their needs and the issues that they want to raise. The Assembly should not try to dictate to victims and survivors.

11.15 am

It is very important to move the process forward. Given the debate that Members have had and the various opinions expressed — which is fair enough; there is no problem with that — I hope that all parties will come together, support the commission, and give it the authority to deal with the issues and get on with its work without interfering too much in its development. I hope that no one will try to tie the commission down and impose conditions that it must meet. The issue is very important, and today the Bill has reached its Final Stage.

The division that has emerged during the debate should not be carried through to the way in which we deal with victims. There have been criticisms about who was, or was not, in the Chamber during the debates. Not all Alliance Party Members — few as they are — are here today. One would have thought that the party’s Whip would have been able to summon all its MLAs if its leader were so concerned about attendance. It is typical of the way in which that party tries to tell everyone else what to do. Over the years, the Alliance Party has tried — or at least it proclaims that it has tried — to bring everybody together and get them to work together. It said that no matter what the situation was, everybody should co-operate and take more time to develop relationships. Now, the Alliance Party has become the party of division in the Chamber rather than the party of co-operation.

It is important that we, the majority of Members in the Chamber, move the process on, give the commission the authority to deal with the issues, and

give the victims and survivors and their families the opportunity to become involved. Let the process be victim-led from now on. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. The original desire to create a commissioner for victims and survivors of the Troubles was an honourable desire to compensate, in some way, those people who suffered innocently at the hands of terrorists. Therefore, an independent, neutral and respected figure was supposed to serve victims and help our society to move beyond its regrettably violent past. However, due to the joint actions of Sinn Féin and the DUP, that honourable intention has been slightly soiled by the grimy compromises that those two parties have cajoled from each other.

The blatant inability of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree on a single Victims' Commissioner has led to the fudge of having four commissioners. The First Minister and deputy First Minister appointed those people and paid them salaries — presumably at the taxpayers' expense — only to discover that they could not legally carry out their work. That has led us to the unfortunate Bill that we are completing today.

In an attempt to stifle debate and protect its compromising position, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister forced the Bill through the Assembly by accelerated passage, albeit that acceleration was interrupted by self-made speed bumps. On 31 March, the deputy First Minister said:

"It was implicit in the case for accelerated passage in this instance that the First Minister and I do not wish to use that procedure as a matter of routine for legislation on victims and survivors, or more generally." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p46, col 2*].

The Ulster Unionist Party expects the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to abide by that statement. We expect that no further victims' legislation will be pushed through the House by means of accelerated passage.

My party has made it clear that it considers the current definition of the word "victim" to be morally wrong. It allows those who perpetrated acts of terrorism to be given the same status as those who suffered at their hands. Despite all its claims, the DUP has failed to address that issue, and the reason for that is that Sinn Féin would not let it do so.

We could not table an amendment on the issue for technical reasons. However, we endeavoured to protect innocent victims by ensuring that no commissioner — or employee of a commissioner — who had a conflict-related conviction would be employed by the commission. Our amendment would have protected innocent victims from being placed in the position in which they would have had to seek help from former

terrorists and victim-makers. However, again, the DUP and Sinn Féin rejected our amendment.

Junior Minister Donaldson's amendment is a laughable attempt to address this issue. Clearly most, if not all, DUP Members would have supported our amendment but were unable to do so. Why was that, Mr Deputy Speaker? Again, it was because Sinn Féin would not let them.

There was a general consensus on the need to have a chief commissioner, which would have given the commission direction and would have ensured that the existing commissioners would not act as independents, serving specific communities within their own remits. For the sake of innocent victims, it is crucial that the commission acts as a comprehensive entity. Regardless of every party supporting the idea of having a chief commissioner — including, I believe, the majority of DUP Members — that has been denied to victims. Why was that, Mr Deputy Speaker? Again, it was because Sinn Féin did not want it.

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, I am not giving way today.

We have seen a departmental fudge that gives the Office of the deputy First Minister and First Minister — and I use that term explicitly: deputy First Minister and First Minister — the power to introduce a chief commissioner and to appoint a chief commissioner in the future. However, having a power without the will to use it is the same as having no power at all.

Although this is a flawed piece of legislation and despite the unsatisfactory manner in which it has been pushed through the House — which, frankly, is a disgrace — the Ulster Unionist Party will support the work of the commission.

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am sorry, I will not give way. We will support the work of the commission because that is the right thing to do. However, let us not be under any illusion: this Bill has been a fudge, largely dictated by Sinn Féin, the only party in the Assembly with a violent history.

The DUP has gained very little movement from its position as a party hell-bent on promoting and protecting its own position at the expense of innocent victims in Northern Ireland. The DUP and Sinn Féin should reflect long and hard on what they have achieved today.

Dr Farry: This process has been a complete shambles since it was inherited by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. There have been repeated delays, and now a total fudge. The

Assembly, as something that was supposed to be putting victims' needs first, has fallen well short of the mark.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister inherited a situation in which they were required to appoint a single commissioner for victims and survivors. They sat on that issue for a number of months and then decided to re-advertise for a single commissioner. Even at that stage, there was no talk of a commission. There was no mention of a commission until we had the situation in which four commissioners designate were announced by OFMDFM.

There was no emergence of the concept of a victims' commission through the normal policy-making processes that are now tried and tested in Northern Ireland, and there was no consultation on the idea of having a victims' commission. The concept of a victims' commission was very much an afterthought, designed to get around the inability of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree on the appointment of a single Victims' Commissioner who would be capable of representing the interests of victims across the spectrum in Northern Ireland.

We now have the bizarre situation in which four individuals have been appointed without the proper legal framework for them to do their job or the legal framework for the commission to exist. That has placed those individuals in a very invidious situation and, frankly, places Assembly Members in an extremely difficult situation, as inevitably personalities become part and parcel of the process. We should focus on implementing proper structures to fulfil the victims' legislation mandate. Personalities should not be drawn into that.

There have been opportunities to discuss this matter in detail. Clearly, it was not initially appreciated that legislation would be required. Indeed, it was only in March — long after the January announcement — that legislation was introduced in the Assembly. Given the situation in which we find ourselves, the Bill should have been given a Committee Stage, which takes only six weeks. If there had been a Committee Stage, we could have had a more constructive and less adversarial discussion on the issue. We would also have had the opportunity to fashion proper amendments to be thrashed out by Committee members and departmental officials. Perhaps a consensus would have been reached that would have corrected the flaws in the legislation.

Accelerated passage was sought, very controversially, but the brakes were then applied. That was a bizarre and totally unprecedented way for any piece of Government legislation in these islands to be handled. Parties have tabled amendments in good faith and in an attempt to improve the legislation. Indeed, one party from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister made it known publicly that they had sympathy

with those amendments. Another bizarre situation emerged when the DUP and Sinn Féin went back into a huddle to try to cobble together some sort of fudge in an effort to paper over the cracks.

The Alliance Party is here to address the needs of victims and to see that a robust solution is implemented to do so. However, we will not hand out blank cheques. We have worked over the past 40 years to deliver peace and stability in Northern Ireland. Other parties that are represented in the Chamber have joined that work rather late in the day, so we will take no lectures on our efforts. Having fought so hard to have devolution restored in Northern Ireland, we are not prepared to let the DUP and Sinn Féin to do as they please. We will not allow them to Balkanise Northern Ireland and merely manage the divisions in our society, rather than moving forward and building a proper shared future.

The Alliance Party wants to have proper, effective democratic institutions and a normalisation of democracy in Northern Ireland. That means establishing a situation in which issues are debated on the Floor of the Assembly, Government Ministers table Bills and motions, and other parties table amendments. That is the normal process of any democratic Chamber and one that we should celebrate, rather than criticise. Until such time as my party is in a position to take its place in Government, it will continue to play the role of a constructive opposition in the Chamber in the coming months and years.

There are deep concerns in the community about the nature of the victims' commission. I stress that those have nothing to do with the integrity of the individuals in question. Those concerns regard the structures of the commission, and whether they will last beyond the current four nominees for the body. People want a single, coherent strategy to deal with victims across the board. There are concerns that the commission will mean a Balkanised system whereby different groups in society, almost implicitly, identify more closely with one commissioner than another. Similarly, staff on the commission may work more closely with one commissioner than another.

We must move forward and overcome the deep divisions of the past that were created by events in Northern Ireland. Those divisions must not simply be set in stone but, rather, overcome. It should be realised that people share much common ground in suffering and in how they access the relevant services to address that suffering.

There is particular concern about the absence of a chief commissioner.

I stress that the Bill merely provides for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to make such an appointment. That appointment will remain subject to

veto by either party in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). Bearing in mind that an amendment providing for appointment of a chief commissioner was rejected, major concerns exist over the prospect of the emergence of a chief commissioner at some time in the future.

11.30 am

The appointment of a chief commissioner is not about creating a hierarchy of victims or about asserting that one viewpoint is more important than any other. It is about setting in stone the normal structures expected in any public body, whether that be the Equality Commission or the Human Rights Commission. It is about ensuring adherence to proper structures, proper administrative procedures and, in particular, proper financial procedures, not least because public money is at stake. Equally, it is important that all staff operate coherently and cohesively, and report to a single individual on the body.

The party Whips will no doubt ensure that the Bill becomes law. The commission will become a legally constituted body, and the Alliance Party will work with it. However, we shall seek to overcome those flaws in the commission's constitution for which the Bill is responsible. We shall use our best endeavours to ensure that the commission delivers for victims in a single, coherent manner.

Mr Shannon: We are on the brink of legislative change that will deliver for victims. It is important to repeat what I said yesterday: the DUP has changed neither its mind nor its position on the Bill. Then, as now, we have victims' best interests at heart. The Bill provides the framework for good and proper delivery of help and support to victims and survivors. That help and support has been withheld for too long.

Dr Farry: The Member says that the DUP has been consistent and has not changed its position. Will he inform the House at what stage the DUP changed from supporting the appointment of a single commissioner to its current position, which is that the appointment of a commission is the best way forward for Northern Ireland?

Mr Shannon: I do not agree with the Member. The DUP's position has been consistent; we have delivered. Our focus is clear: we are working on behalf of the victims. An example of that may be found in the Budget, wherein £36 million is allocated directly to victims. Never before has that been done.

Mrs D Kelly: In the absence of any guidance from the First Minister or the deputy First Minister, the Member may be able to detail exactly how that £36 million will be spent. Will he confirm that the Health Service has already spent much of it in treating victims and survivors? How much control will individual commissioners have over allocation of those funds?

Mr Shannon: The Member is correct: £36 million has been set aside. The decision on how it is to be spent has yet to be taken. However, that will be decided, and our position is clear. The Member will have an opportunity to have input into that process, as will all Members.

We welcome statements from the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Ulster Unionists that they will work with the commission. That is a step forward.

Never before has £36 million been set aside for victims alone; never before has a commission for victims been in place. Things have moved on. The money is in place, the commission is in place, and the legislation is a step in the right direction. This Assembly has awarded much more money from its Budget than any previous Westminster Government or any Government made up of Assembly parties ever allocated.

Let us deliver that money to those who need it most. Many victims are not members of victims' groups, and those people must be considered. Until now, they have borne their sorrow and burdens on their own. We have a duty to respond to them directly. The Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill gives us an opportunity to deliver for all victims, whether they be groups or individuals.

I urge Members to move on.

Mr Irwin: Although Members from several parties have been vocally opposed to the Bill, when it came to Divisions on the various stages of the Bill, very few of those Members — particularly from Mr Kennedy's party — actually voted. If those Members were as concerned as they said they were, they should have been turned up to vote.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for that intervention. As has been mentioned, the Hansard reports can be checked, and the names of those Members who were present and participated — as well as those who did not — will be clear for all to see. My friend is correct that there were absences on the part of the UUP. However, that party can answer for itself.

Mr B McCrea: I am somewhat confused. Is the DUP trying to build a consensus on this issue, or to stoke up division? *[Laughter.]*

There are guffaws from a sedentary position. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members were reminded yesterday that all remarks must be made through the Chair. The rule has not changed overnight.

Mr B McCrea: The Ulster Unionist Party has made its position quite clear, and Mr Kennedy has set that out. We will support the victims' commission when it is established, but we do not like the way in which it has been created, nor do we like the political fudge and

the machinations surrounding its creation. The UUP does not believe that that does justice to the real victims. Frankly, we believe that it is a disgrace. If we are being asked to vote for something that is a disgrace, I am afraid that certain parties are on a different planet.

Mr Shannon: The point that I made is that some Ulster Unionist Party Members were not present here to vote either for or against the Bill. According to the Hansard reports, the Member's party and its Members have not been present in the Chamber when they should have been to make their opinions clearly known.

We have moved forward. I hope that Basil McCrea can move forward as well. The debate is over and the discussions have concluded. Now is the time to move forward and deliver for the victims.

The DUP has been consistent and honest. We have delivered in the past, and we are about to do so again in respect of victims. The money that has been set aside and the creation of the commission is proof of that delivery. We are delivering for the people who have suffered through the Troubles in this Province.

The victims are our focus and our priority. I ask Members to support the legislative change before us to ensure that we can move forward. Let all the posturing and division from certain parties be left in the past. Let us go forward together and support the victims.

Mr S Wilson: Many people will be relieved that the Assembly has reached the stage at which the finalisation of the legislation is at hand and that some structure will be put in place to channel help towards victims and to represent them. However, some have used the legislative process and this debate to engage in point-scoring, nit-picking and finding excuses not to offer support.

I was not planning to speak in this debate until I heard the speech from Mr Kennedy on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. Although I have a lot of time for Mr Kennedy, I have never heard such a whingeing, self-justifying, hypocritical and political-point-scoring speech in my life. That was not becoming of him or of the serious issue that we are addressing.

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not unparliamentarily to use the term "hypocritical" in respect of another Member of this House?

Mr S Wilson: I imagine that if it was unjustified, it would not be in order. However, since I think that it is probably justified —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to withdraw his remark.

Mr S Wilson: I will withdraw the remark, but only in so far as other Members of —

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have been taking careful notes of the debate. Mrs Kelly described my position as being one of "hypocrisy and dishonesty". You did not ask her to withdraw those remarks, but you are asking my colleague to withdraw a remark that contained the word "hypocrite". Can we have some equity in the Chamber?

Mr Deputy Speaker: If there had been an objection, I would have asked Mrs Kelly to withdraw her remarks.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I formally object to the comments that were made by Mrs Kelly.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I hope that the Member will allow me to permit Mr Wilson to continue his speech.

Mr S Wilson: Many people would perceive what Mr Kennedy was involved in as hypocritical and as a display of double standards.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Some time ago, did you not clarify, for the benefit of the Assembly, that, while it was not appropriate to refer to individuals as "hypocrites", one could refer to a party as "a bunch of hypocrites"?

Mr S Wilson: That being the case —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Allow me to respond, Mr Wilson. That is correct, Mr McCrea.

Mr S Wilson: That being the case, the position of all of the people to my right could be perceived as being hypocritical in a number of ways. First, they were hypocritical in the words that were issued this morning, and secondly —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: No. Let me just finish this point.

Secondly, the record of the Assembly's debate —

Mr McNarry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Have you or have you not asked the Member for East Antrim to withdraw his remark? Have you or have you not heard that withdrawal? Will you or will you not tell the House that you accept the Member's withdrawal?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am happy that the Member withdrew the remark.

Mr S Wilson: I have withdrawn the remark. Furthermore, I clarified it by saying that it was not only one person who was guilty of the accusation that I made, but a whole bunch. Let me give some justification for that. We have heard self-justification from Mr Kennedy today. However, so intensely did his party feel about the issues, so passionate was it about the changes that were required, and so deeply supportive of its position

were its members, that half of them did not bother turning up to vote — and the record will show that.

Some Members: Shame.

Mr S Wilson: That is how deeply the Members on my right felt about the issue.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: I will give way to Mr Kennedy, and I hope that he will provide some explanation as to why his party colleagues did not turn up to vote on the amendments.

Mr Kennedy: When one thinks of shame, and when one thinks of people who will, and should, be ashamed of themselves when they examine the voting record, none should be more ashamed than Sammy Wilson and his party colleagues, who went into the same Lobby as provisional Sinn Féin.

Mr S Wilson: Let me come to that now —
[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that this is a serious debate about a serious subject, and Members will not do credit to the House if they continue with this style of debate.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask Mr Kennedy to withdraw his remarks, because there is no party in this Chamber registered as provisional Sinn Féin.

Mr McNarry: He did not say that you were a party.

Mr Molloy: I did not raise that as a question; I was challenging what Mr Kennedy said. There is no party called provisional Sinn Féin. It must be made clear that the party is called Sinn Féin.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will Mr Kennedy please clarify his remarks?

11.45 am

Mr Kennedy: I am happy to clarify that I did not actually list a party, but said “Members of provisional Sinn Féin”. If Mr Molloy claims that he is not or never has been a member of provisional Sinn Féin, that is news to most of us. However, I did not indicate a political party in my description.

Mr Molloy: The Member said that the DUP went into the Lobby along with provisional Sinn Féin. Given that there is no registered party in this Chamber called provisional Sinn Féin, I again ask the Member to withdraw his remark.

Mr Kennedy: To give perfect clarify: I said that Members of the DUP went into the same Lobby as Members of provisional Sinn Féin. That is an indisputable fact.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is no organisation

called provisional Sinn Féin — full stop. Therefore, there could not have been anyone going anywhere with members of provisional Sinn Féin because that organisation does not exist.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Deputy Speaker, I clarify that there is no party called provisional Sinn Féin. If there is any further unhappiness about the matter, I suggest that Members refer to the Hansard report, and the matter can be raised at the next meeting. Are Members happy with that? Please continue, Mr Wilson.

Mr S Wilson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The real shame is that Members of the Ulster Unionist Party have stood here today wringing their hands about this legislation and talking about the shame of it. However, when they tabled amendments to the Bill, they could not even get the support of half their own party, who were so indifferent that they did not bother turning up to vote. I feel absolutely no shame about what we, as a party, have done. We made a promise, and these are the promises — [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr S Wilson: I do not mind the chattering behind me, because I know that I am getting somewhere with the Members who are involved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. For the last time, I ask Members to make all their remarks through the Chair. If they persist in interrupting, I will apply Standing Order 60, and Members know what that means.

Mr S Wilson: I do not mind a wee bit of chattering, because I know that if it is going on beside me, I probably have made the point that I wanted to.

Let me make something clear: we made a promise that, first, we would secure resources for victims. That has been done. People can question how those resources will be spent. Indeed, I even heard a derogatory comment, which I think came from a sedentary position on the SDLP Benches, that some of the resources would go to the Health Service to help victims. If that is the kind of help that victims require, is that not a good place for those funds to go? Some groups will benefit from the resources immediately, and some groups will benefit from a further dispersal of the funds through the victims’ strategy. Securing those resources is the first promise that was made, and that has been done.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: No, I will not give way — let me finish my point.

The second promise that we made was to seek a way of dealing with the issue of victims. There is a certain amount of embarrassment to the Benches on my right about that issue because, for the four years that the Ulster Unionist Party was in the lead position

in the Assembly and had the opportunity to introduce legislation on the matter, it did not do so. Of course, therefore, that party is somewhat embarrassed. Its members will chip and chirp about the legislation, but at least we said that we would do something about the issue of victims, and we have sought to deliver on that promise.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way; it will give him time to think. I want to make it clear that I did not make a remark from a sedentary position about expenditure on the Health Service; I was attempting to expose the fact that much of the £36 million involved is not new money and will be spent as was originally intended.

Mr S Wilson: Of course, some of the money will include old money; I never suggested that it was all new money. It will be an amalgamation of old and new money. The point is that £36 million has been allocated to victims, which is more than was available previously. How that will be spent will be determined by victims' needs. If those needs are health related, for example, surely it is right that the money is spent in that area.

There have been a number of complaints about the nature of what has been achieved through the Bill. I listened to what Alliance Party Members have said about the Balkanisation of politics in Northern Ireland, and the fact that Sinn Féin and the DUP must now have input into the process. Other parties have also had input. Such Balkanisation, whether they like it or not, is something that the Alliance Party has been preaching about for years — its Members have always argued of the need for inclusivity. The belief that inclusivity can be achieved at the same time as one particular party is getting its way illustrates the naivety of the Alliance Party and the Ulster Unionist Party.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Does the Member agree with me, as one who was present when the institutions that we are now operating were agreed on Good Friday 1998, that the architects of the current structures — and Mr McNarry talks about vetoes — were the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party? They created the system that is in place. When it comes to hypocrisy, all three parties are guilty.

Mr S Wilson: That is exactly the point: they did create the system. Whether parties like it or not, in finding a way forward when there are differences of opinions, no party is always going to get its own way.

Mr Kennedy: Can any party get a fair deal?

Mr S Wilson: Yes; we got a fair deal, which I will come to. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure how many more times I will have to advise Members to

make their remarks through the Chair. At some stage, I will have to take action.

Mr S Wilson: Again, the discomfort on the Benches to my right is something that those Members have to account for.

At the end of the process, the victims have got a fair deal; additional money is available; and a commission has been set up that will be able to gather and channel the concerns of the victims, consider a strategy for them and dispense the money. That is a better deal than that delivered by the Ulster Unionist Party, which is perhaps one of the reasons for its members' discomfort.

In order to achieve consensus in the House, Members have to work their way through party differences. The outcome has been that we now have a commission that will deal with victims, and legislation now exists that allows for the appointment of a chief commissioner. The four commissioners have said that they believe, from their work to date, that they can work together. For example, they have rotated the chairmanship of their meetings, and they believe that they can speak with one voice.

If the commissioners believe that they do not currently need a chief commissioner, and if there is uncertainty among some of the parties as to whether a chief commissioner is required, the best that we can do is to provide legislation that will allow a chief commissioner to be appointed if necessary. That is what politics is all about. Perhaps if the party to my right had understood what negotiations were about and how to get what they want in negotiations, they would have been able to demonstrate that flexibility.

The legislation will provide the flexibility to allow a chief commissioner to be appointed. However, if the commission feels that it can operate without a chief commissioner, the legislation will give it the freedom to do that. Why should the legislation fall on the basis that something should be imposed on the commission that it believes it does not need? If a chief commissioner is needed, this House, the Executive, and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have the ability to appoint one. That is a reasonable way out of the impasse that was reached.

In the future, if we decide that we no longer want to have the commission in its present form — or if we decide that we want a single commissioner instead of a commission — the legislation gives us the ability to make those changes. That is what the parties who are objecting to this Bill wanted.

Mr Kennedy talked about employment rights. The amendment that the DUP proposed stated that the commission could not employ anybody with a criminal conviction, and, legally, that is the most that can be done. Therefore, we addressed that point.

The definition of a victim is something that the DUP would like to see changed. The current definition is not acceptable.

Mr B McCrea: Why was nothing done about that?

Mr S Wilson: We have reached this stage because when the Ulster Unionist Party had the ability to deal with that issue, it dithered and procrastinated, and it failed. When direct rule —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: Let me finish the point first.

Some Members: It failed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: The Member will not give way because he does not want to engage in debate.

Mr S Wilson: I will engage in debate —

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Two Members cannot stand up at the same time, and Members cannot shout at each other in the manner that has been happening. Before Standing Order 60 is applied, perhaps Members will give this debate the respect that it deserves.

Mr S Wilson: The issue was dealt with under direct rule because it was not dealt with when the opportunity existed previously. Under direct rule, a definition of a victim was produced that my party is not happy with. However, the competency did not exist at that point to make changes to the definition. I hope that we will produce a definition that is acceptable. That issue will be addressed through the forum that is being set up.

At least the DUP has sought to address that issue in a way that does not —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: I will give way in a minute or two, because I know that Mr Basil McCrea is keen to be heard once again.

There is no point in pretending that this issue could have been dealt with, at that stage, in the way in which the Ulster Unionist Party wanted. It is much better to consider a way in which we can address that issue properly. Had it been addressed in the previous Assembly, perhaps there would be a much better definition in law than the one that we currently have.

Mr B McCrea: I will attempt to deal with this issue with the respect that it demands. The Member made a point about dealing with the issue when the opportunity existed. As far as the Ulster Unionist Party is concerned, the definition of a victim cannot be changed unless the long title of the Bill is changed. We asked for the long title to be changed so that this issue could be confronted. The DUP had the opportunity to do that, but fudged it.

The Member is now prevaricating and filibustering — talking at the top of his voice to try to avoid the issue.

People will not understand why we have not dealt with the matter of the definition of a victim — that is our job. We should have tackled that now; and the Member agrees.

Mr S Wilson: Of course I agree that the issue should be tackled, and a mechanism has been set up to try to deal with that. As far as the long title of the Bill is concerned, the legal advice — and the Member who made the intervention is well aware of this — indicated that the long title could not be changed.

I do not know the details of the legal advice. However, it was accepted that the long title could not be changed at that stage and, therefore, the issue of definition could not be dealt with.

12.00 noon

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to examine that matter in more detail. The Ulster Unionist Party's understanding was that the definition could not be changed unless the long title was changed. If there is another way of changing the definition of "victim", I would be pleased to explore how that most contentious of issues can be tackled. That is one of the most fundamental problems that the Ulster Unionist Party has with the Bill, and many other Members share that concern.

Mr S Wilson: That concern is shared by other Members. I have made it clear that that concern is shared by my party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party. The only party that has no difficulty with the definition of victims, as it stands, is Sinn Féin. We must look for ways of dealing with that issue. The DUP is happy to investigate whether that can be dealt with through a private Member's Bill, through consultation with the forum for victims and survivors, which may be able to reach agreement on that contentious issue, or in whatever other way is available. I accept that that is the one outstanding major issue that must be dealt with.

There has been criticism in respect of the ability of one individual on the commission to use the power of veto, and that has been dealt with through negotiation. The only other issues that will require consensus are matters that would have had to be dealt with — in the first instance — by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister anyhow and, therefore, if consensus were reached between them, it is unlikely that consensus would not have been reached in the commission. That issue was raised at the start of the process.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for eventually giving way on the issue of consensus, and for coming back to that. About 10 minutes ago in his rant, he said that no one party could have its way in a consensus situation. Six weeks ago, when the Alliance Party first tabled amendments in an effort to improve

the workings of the commission in respect of the voting system and the appointment of a chief commissioner, four of the five parties agreed that there was merit in that.

Can the Member explain why one party has had its own way? He was not in the Chamber yesterday when I congratulated Ms Ni Chuilín on her ability to enforce her Whip on the DUP Back-Benchers. It is clear that that has happened.

Mr S Wilson: I cannot understand that approach. The Alliance Party appears to have the impression that only its amendments could have dealt with the issues about which Members had concerns, and that, if the issues were not dealt with in its preferred way, they were not being dealt with properly at all. The same outcome has been achieved by examining other ways in which those matters could be addressed — namely that there is not the power of veto, we have the potential for a chief commissioner, we have the ability to change the shape of the commission and the number of commissioners, and we can ensure that people with criminal records are not employed by the commission.

OFMDFM's amendments differed from the wording of the amendments that the Alliance Party proposed. Nevertheless, they achieved the same objective. It is a bit infantile of the Alliance Party to now say that, simply because the amendments that were accepted — although they were designed to reach exactly the same objective as those designed by the Alliance Party — did not have the Alliance Party's wording, that they had to be opposed.

Mr Ford: Perhaps the Member can explain why, if the amendments proposed by Mr Donaldson achieved exactly the same objectives and were exactly the same as the amendments tabled by Mrs Kelly and myself, among others, it was necessary to put forward amendments that differed from what had already been tabled.

Mr S Wilson: Of course the amendments were not exactly the same, although the outcome has been the same, namely that there is the potential, when required, for a chief commissioner.

The Alliance Party may, regardless of how the commissioners designate believe they can behave, wish to impose on them an arrangement that they say is not needed because they can work things out among themselves. If the Alliance Party is now involved in imposition of that nature, even though the commissioners designate have said that they have had no difficulty to date —

Dr Farry: The Member is making the argument that there is no need for a chief commissioner because the four current incumbents of the commission are capable of sorting things out between themselves. Is it good practice to design structures of governance around particular individuals who may be there at a particular

time, or is it better to design them to be robust and able to deal with a number of different circumstances? I cannot think of any other precedent in which, because the current incumbents are said to be fine, there is no need to put in place the proper structures for accountability, particularly on issues regarding finance. I find that totally bizarre.

Mr S Wilson: That is not in fact what has been done, because the law allows, if there should be a change and the current arrangements are seen not to be working, for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to appoint a chief commissioner. That flexibility is there.

We are coming to the end of the process of this legislation. As all of the other parties have accepted, it is important that, once the legislation goes through, we work to ensure that there is an effective mechanism for dealing with the issues surrounding victims. I hope that, despite the political points that have been made — perhaps necessarily made, in a Chamber such as this — once this Stage of the Bill has passed, all parties will work with the commissioners to ensure that there is effective delivery for victims.

Mr B McCrea: I wish to say at the outset, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, that first and foremost the most important issue is the welfare of victims — genuine victims. We have fought, and continue to fight, for their well-being. I commend my colleague Mr Kennedy for his excellent speech, which I heard both on the television monitors and when I was in the Chamber. It obviously hit the nail on the head on a number of occasions, judging by the reaction of other Members in the Chamber.

A number of suggestions have been made. When Mr Shannon was speaking I asked him whether he was trying to build consensus or stir up division. Our party has made its point through all the Stages of this legislation. Our record is clear. We have identified the very real concerns and disappointments that we had, but it has become apparent that there is a cosy coalition between the two largest parties. There is a political fudge that is designed to get them through this particular issue, and no amount of interventions, debates or amendments will make any difference.

Even the combined votes of the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Alliance Party and the Green Party would not be enough to overturn the decisions that have been made. The process of this legislation is a complete and utter sham, and when people look at this from outside this ivory tower, they will see, with some concern, that we did not address the issue of the definition of "victim". We did not address the issue concerning the appointment of four commissioners, which many people think is a strange decision, nor did we address

the issue concerning the possible compromise position of having a chief commissioner.

Despite all of that, having had our say, our party then resolved to support the generality of the Bill. We do want to have some sort of commission that will tackle the needs of the victims. People have pointed fingers and said that we were not in the Chamber yesterday to vote, as if in some way that meant that we do not care about victims, or we are not doing it in the right way. I see people nodding, and I am quite prepared to debate the point in public outside the Chamber with anybody here now that is prepared to take it on. How can anybody —

Mr S Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will of course give way in just a moment.

How can anybody not be in favour of supporting victims? It is ridiculous. Sammy Wilson is trying to argue that black is white and that good is bad. Nobody in their right mind could do anything other than support victims. The big question, of course, as Sammy Wilson has accepted, is how to define a victim.

Mr S Wilson: Perhaps the Member would explain why half of his own party felt so unconcerned about their amendment that they did not bother turning up to vote?

Mr Kennedy: Mr Basil McCrea will undoubtedly agree with me that the arithmetic of this place was the real reason why it was not possible for the Ulster Unionist Party to defeat Sinn Féin on the issue of victims: it was because the DUP supported Sinn Féin.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McNarry: It is a two-party coalition.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order; the rules of this House apply to all Members, not just to some. The majority of Members have been extremely good and have taken the debate seriously. A few, unfortunately, have not, and that is to be regretted.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank Mr Kennedy for his erudite intervention, which clearly demonstrates the political reality. If this debate has achieved nothing else, it has shown quite clearly that when there is a DUP/Sinn Féin axis, there is nothing that the rest of the Members can do about it. It does not matter whether cross-community controls are in place, whether reason is on the side of their opponents, or whether people disagree with their argument — the DUP/Sinn Féin axis cannot be stopped.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will give way in just a moment, Mr Storey.

I cannot recall the DUP/Sinn Féin axis accepting an amendment to this Bill or any other Bill that has been proposed by other Members. That is not the way to proceed. If we are genuine about building consensus and about building a future for this place, it will not rest on a two-party, cosy coalition. This is supposed to be a mandatory coalition of all parties, and the DUP and Sinn Féin are not taking other points of views on board.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. If he is so concerned about what he terms the “DUP/Sinn Féin axis”, and he and his party cannot turn up to vote when required to; when will the Ulster Unionist Party do what we know it does not have the capacity to do, which is to follow its own convictions, leave the Executive and ask its two Ministers to walk out with it?

Will he also explain — if he is as concerned about victims as he says his party is — why his party, while occupying a lead role in Government, allowed out of prison murderers and criminals who created victims? He has the bare-faced cheek to come into this House and accuse the DUP of not doing anything for victims.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McNarry: We did not go into power with them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Yes you did.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order; if the debate becomes any more unruly, I have the power to suspend it for an hour, which would be an absolute shame.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. An issue has been raised about why parties in previous Administrations did not bring forward legislation to deal with victims. *[Interruption.]*

As far as I am aware, any party may bring forward legislation at any time. Therefore, when people ask the Ulster Unionist Party why it did not do so, our response is to ask them the same question — if it was such a big issue, why did they not bring forward legislation?

Mr Storey’s question about whether Ulster Unionists should be considering leaving the Assembly leads me to wonder whether that is what he wants us to do.

Does he prefer to be in a genuine cosy coalition with just “themselves alone” on the opposite Benches? Is that what he wants? The Assembly might as well accept —

12.15 pm

Ms D Kelly: Will the Member acknowledge that in 1998, the people of Ireland, North and South, agreed the terms of the Good Friday Agreement — the agreement under which the DUP now operates? One of the agreement’s accomplishments is that acts such as that which happened last night are now, thankfully, rare.

Mr B McCrea: I share Mrs Kelly's sense that her party and mine did the heavy lifting for peace. Our parties tackled the hard issues head on. My party was honest and true. It did not say one thing to the electorate and do another — *[Laughter.]* It stood by its principles.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will give way in a moment. My party stood by its principles then, and it stands firm again. When it comes to the issue of victims, it does what it believes is best for them; it puts them at the very forefront of what it wants to achieve — not just because it is right, but because it is necessary for progress.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will have to now, because I said earlier that I would.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank the Member for giving way. He said that the Ulster Unionist Party was, at all times, honest with people and stood by its principles. Although it was before his time, I remind him that his party once had an election slogan: "No guns, no Government". The Ulster Unionist Party said that it would not go into Government until paramilitary guns had been dealt with. Yet, that party went into Government without a single rusty bullet having been decommissioned. How did it stick to its principles then? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members to speak to the Bill, which is the subject of the debate. In doing so, perhaps they will be somewhat more restrained in their comments.

Mr B McCrea: I will, of course, speak to the Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker. Never, never, never, never has my party done anything other than defend victims. *[Interruption.]*

When ordinary people outside the Chamber look at what has happened in the debate, they will see the shenanigans that have taken place. They will point the figure and will ask which Members are genuine about the matter and want to sort it out. I agree with Mr Wilson on many issues, one of which is that the people who shout loudest usually have most to fear.

Let me say clearly that the Ulster Unionist Party will support the victims' commission because it is the only show in town. Party Members do not like the way at which it was arrived. We do not like its constitution. However, we are willing to do what is right for the victims of conflict and the people of Northern Ireland. No amount of prevarication and muddying of the waters —

Mr Simpson: On a point of clarification, will the Member confirm that his former leader, Mr Trimble, and Mr Mallon launched a document in the Craigavon Civic Centre that related to the definition of a victim, and that that is where it all started?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is entitled to be heard.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, you have, with considerable patience, asked that Members address the matter at hand.

Mr Elliott: Will the Member accept that when the DUP had an opportunity to change the definition of "victim" it failed to do so, because it could not get agreement from its partner in crime, Sinn Féin? Mr Wilson practically accepted that every party except Sinn Féin agreed that the definition of "victim" should be changed. The DUP is being held to ransom. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The definition of "victim" is not part of the Bill, which means that we have once again moved off the subject.

Mr Elliott: It should be part of the Bill.

Mr B McCrea: It is obvious — and regrettable — that there is not consensus on the issue. The Members to my left should have proceeded with this piece of legislation in a seemly way, but instead they chose to stir it up again. We have made our position clear. When people come to judge the DUP's actions, they will not accept that the party did this properly. Many members of the party to my left agree with the issues that we have raised. I know that because, like me, they will have constituents who say that they are unhappy about what has happened, that it is a political fudge, and that it is not the right way to proceed.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr McCrea is vexed because there is going to be a victims Bill. Mr McCrea and his party built their hopes on the fact that there would not be a victims Bill; that would have pleased them immensely. Today, they hang their heads in shame, because something has been achieved that they never had the guts, will or determination to do.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Contrary to Lord Morrow's comments, a victims Bill has been in existence since 2006. What we are supposed to be discussing today is the establishment of a commission, because the DUP and Sinn Féin could not agree on the appointment of one commissioner.

Mr B McCrea: I want to conclude my speech, provided that there are no further —

Some Members: Hear, hear.

A Member: There is consensus on that.

Mr B McCrea: Had it not been for that comment — made from a sedentary position — I would have forgotten that Sinn Féin was here. It is amazing that it is not — *[Interruption.]*

When it gets to this point it is important that we send out the right message to those victims who have suffered so horrendously over the past 30 to 40 years. We, as a party, will work with the commission and we wish it well. However, we are disturbed that we were not able to deal with a number of important issues.

Nevertheless, the democratic process is such that the DUP and Sinn Féin have brought a Bill; we have highlighted certain deficiencies; a vote will be taken and the Bill will be carried. However, I hope that, if it does not work out in the way that they anticipate, they will have the good grace to acknowledge that the points made in the Chamber were not only right but helpful. I hope that they stop the party political bickering in a bid to win political points, because this is an important matter.

Mr Attwood: When Sammy Wilson, who has now left the Chamber, concluded his remarks — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Kennedy: He has moved position again.

Mr Attwood: I see that he has returned. *[Interruption.]*

I did not spot you in that suit, Sammy — it is not glaring enough.

When Sammy Wilson was in the Chamber, to which he has now returned, he said that all Members of the Assembly should:

“work to ensure that there is an effective mechanism for dealing with the issues surrounding victims.”

Mr Wilson went on to say that, after all the political points have been made and the legislative process completed, we should all work with the victims’ commission. Mr Basil McCrea has just expressed the same sentiments. As Dolores Kelly said, the SDLP will abstain from the vote. In doing so, our actions are consistent with those sentiments. We do that not to convey opposition to a victims’ commission per se but to indicate our lingering doubts about the powers that the victims’ commission might have and its role.

Although I do not often agree with Sammy Wilson, there are times — if for only a moment — when I do. I agree that work must be done to ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to deal with victims’ issues. On that theme, I shall make four or five points. The Bill will soon become law, and it is reasonable to expect that, in those circumstances, individual victims and groups will knock on the door, or doors, of the victims’ commission to advocate on behalf of their

individual and broader needs. That is when the really big issues will emerge.

Over and above the issues that have been rightly and properly debated in the Chamber over the past few weeks, and over and above the powers and the moneys that the victims’ commission will have, issues concerning the victims’ commission will endure. The Chamber will not be able to deal with those issues, and that will lead to individual victims and victims’ groups having a level of expectation that will not be fulfilled.

There are three or four reasons for that. On a range of victims’ matters, Members are not masters of their own destiny. The British Government are masters of destiny on such matters; they have established the law that governs a number of victims’ issues. That law has been established not by us, but by the British Government. They have laid down constraints on what can happen with certain victims. One need only consider how the British Government have changed tribunal legislation in order to understand how they will introduce legislation to constrain what a victim or a victim’s family can do. The primary and particular purpose of the Inquiries Act 2005 was to restrict the Finucane family’s ability to get the truth about the murder of the solicitor Patrick Finucane. The Assembly does not have the power to amend any or all of that legislation.

However, the issue goes deeper than that. As the SDLP leader, Mark Durkan, said at the weekend, the British Government now propose legislation that could lead to the establishment of a special-cases coroner. That legislation may roll out in the North and affect the conduct of inquests here. As we know from European Court decisions, dozens of inquests around which there are serious issues are waiting to be convened. However, the British Government may be about to legislate in a way in which those inquests will be constrained in what they can and cannot do.

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek a ruling. I appreciate that legislation from Westminster may lead to serious issues, such as issues around coroners’ courts and inquests. However, I struggle to see how the Member is speaking to the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to stick closely to the Bill.

Mr Attwood: I appreciate that ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker. A great deal of flexibility has been shown in the Chamber, and I was exploiting that flexibility.

I move on to matters that affect the Bill, and that particularly affect the victims’ commission. The SDLP tabled amendments to the Bill that were not accepted. If made, those amendments would have incorporated the Paris Principles into the workings of the victims’ commission. The Paris Principles are established UN standards that govern the powers, or otherwise, of an independent commission to do its business.

12.30 pm

We know all about those powers, because when the Assembly established the position of Children's Commissioner, it legislated for the Paris principles to be embedded in that post's authority. That enables the Children's Commissioner to call for papers, summon witnesses and support applicants in matters relating to their cases.

From recent history, we know of the long and tedious battle that was fought with the British Government to ensure that some of the Paris principles were embedded in the Human Rights Commission's authority. However, the victims' commissioners will not have the power to call for papers, summon witnesses and subpoena evidence that might come to their attention through a victim or a victims' group. Consequently, in the near future, when people ask the commission for victims and survivors to act as their voice, the victims' commissioners — through no fault of their own — will only be able to reply that, although they may be those peoples' voice, they do not have the power and authority to act on victims' and survivors' wishes by compelling witnesses to appear and by gathering evidence.

If powers consistent with the Paris principles were good enough for the Children's Commissioner, the Human Rights Commissioner and other commissions in the North, the House should stretch itself to provide the same powers for the commission for victims and survivors, which, through no fault of its own, will be weaker without them.

Thirdly, many sensitive and important matters have been rightly addressed in the debate. However, based on my observations, there has been little discussion about what the commission will actually do. The SDLP wishes to put down some markers — not exclusively or exhaustively, but representatively — about matters that the commission should address immediately after the vote.

Through various structures and initiatives, the victims' commissioners should act as voices for victims and survivors. The commission should provide, as we heard earlier, the fullest possible range of welfare, financial and broader support for those in need; and, when the Eames/Bradley recommendations are forthcoming, the commission should be the custodian of, and responsible for, advancing those recommendations. In future, I hope that Assembly debates will be concerned with addressing those types of matters, rather than the other matters that were, rightly, raised in recent weeks.

My fourth point is about how the Eames/Bradley group will relate to the commission. If the Assembly is to send any message to the Northern Ireland people — especially to those who are still hurting and grieving — it should be that every individual deserves the right to the truth about what happened to their family member

or loved one. However, I have not heard that message coming from the Chamber in a unified voice.

I shall provide two examples. First, in a question for written answer, I asked:

“the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that (i) it will co-operate fully and in all matters with the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past and (ii) it will encourage all groups and individuals to co-operate also.”

Given that I asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, or the junior Ministers, to address those questions, I wonder why the following answer was given:

“Both of us have met with the Consultative Group in January 2008. The Consultative Group is to present a report to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by summer 2008. We therefore have no direct responsibility for, or role in, this group. We await the outcome of this group.”

I asked the shared office of leadership in the North those simple questions: will it co-operate and will it encourage all others to co-operate as well? On both matters, the answer was silence.

What does it say to people in the North and to the victims' commission when the Department that sponsored the Bill is silent when it is asked a simple question about the principle of co-operation with Eames/Bradley? Is that the standard that will best inform the victims' commission on how to do its work and inform society as it tries to deal with the difficult issues of the past?

I have doubts about how the process will work if all organisations and parties do not co-operate fully with Eames/Bradley or with any other legitimate inquiry — police or otherwise — that is ongoing in the North. The Bloody Sunday Inquiry revealed that, at the time of the subject of its investigation, a Member of the House was bound to an illegal organisation by a code of honour that was greater than the obligation to co-operate and provide information. I would welcome hearing whether that is still the case.

I hope that we are moving beyond all that. However, in the day that is in it, given that the McCartney murder trial is due to commence today, telling the truth and co-operation will be essential in determining whether there are convictions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to restrict his remarks to the Bill.

Mr Attwood: The reason for OFMDFM's ambiguous response to a question in the House about co-operating fully on all matters and encouraging all groups and individuals to co-operate is — unfortunately — still unclear.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, and I will respond to some of their remarks. The victims' commission that the Bill will establish is a genuine

attempt to do something better for the victims of the period in Northern Ireland that has become known as the Troubles and to ensure that they have the support and recognition that they deserve.

Members may debate whether the proposals in the Bill are flawed or ineffective, and they are entitled to their view. However, the DUP and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister believe that the proposals are robust and capable of delivering for the innocent victims in Northern Ireland, the needs of whom are paramount in all discussions about the Bill.

Mrs Dolores Kelly said that the powers of the commission would be ineffective. At one stage, she referred to something that I said about the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 in response to points that her party leader, Mr Durkan, made in the debate during the Bill's Consideration Stage. I have a copy of the Hansard report of that debate, and, in fact, I did not accuse Mr Durkan of failing to change the Order — I know that an Order cannot be amended once it has been presented and that it can only be accepted or rejected. The Hansard report is clear that I told Mr Durkan to re-read the Order because it contains many of the powers about which he spoke.

The Bill deals with the narrow issue of creating the corporate body that will be known as the victims' commission, the powers of which are already outlined in the Order, even though they were originally meant for one commissioner. After the interview process and further consideration of the matter, the First Minister and deputy First Minister felt that the requirements of the post were so great that it was wrong to put such a heavy burden on the shoulders of one person. That, in turn, created the need for a commission. That is why the Bill is before the House and why we are asking Members to support it — it is necessary to make progress on the huge amount of work that is required in the victims and survivors' sector.

The commission is only one part of that. A victims' strategy will be introduced shortly, and it will be issued for consultation. Despite the criticisms that have been made in this House and in this debate, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not believe that it has a monopoly on all knowledge and wisdom on these issues. We want to hear from the people who matter most — those who have to live daily with the consequences of being a victim — and we want them to be involved in shaping the strategy.

OFMDFM will also be bringing forward proposals on funding. Mrs Kelly mentioned the funding of £36 million and suggested that it was simply old money being recycled. It is regrettable that she said that; it is unfortunate when Members try to score cheap points on what is a genuine attempt to ensure that victims' groups and individuals get the resources and support

that they need. I say to Mrs Kelly that a lot of this is about healthcare. Of the proposed £36 million, £19.5 million is new money. Although the remainder has been allocated to the victims' sector, none of it is being taken from the healthcare budget — it is new, additional money that is specifically for the victims' sector. I hope that Mrs Kelly will at last recognise that this is a genuine attempt to provide resources for the victims-and-survivors' sector. It represents more money than has ever been made available under any previous Administration, including the one that was headed jointly by Mrs Kelly's party and the Ulster Unionist Party.

Whatever is being said about the amounts of money involved and about the intentions behind the establishment of the victims' commission, I know and recognise that we — and I mean all Members — will be judged on results and on how effective the commission proves to be over time. This is about building a partnership with the victims' sector to ensure that there is delivery, not just for the groups who work in the sector but for the individuals who are not associated with any group — they are often the people who are silent and who suffer in silence. Ways must be found to help those people, to identify their needs and to ensure that those needs are met.

Mr Attwood made similar points to those of Mrs Kelly on the powers of the commission — it really depends on what Members want the commission to do. It will have a role — but not an exclusive role — in looking at the past. Its role will be in partnership with that of the forum, which I know the SDLP has long called for. The commission will work in partnership with whatever emerges from the current discussions on how we are going to deal with the past. We recognise that the commission will have a role to play, but that it will not be the ultimate authority on how the past is dealt with. The way forward on that aspect has yet to be worked out.

Mr Ford described the Bill and the process as being flawed. He said that Sinn Féin had steamrollered the DUP. I assure Mr Ford that the DUP has not been steamrollered. I stand here of my own free will, as a Minister, with the full support of my colleagues, fully supporting this Bill and the amendments. Indeed, I moved the amendments. No one steamrollers the DUP. The DUP has made up its own mind on the issues; as has Sinn Féin. However, a responsibility exists within the system that Mr Ford and his party supported at its establishment — the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I see Mr Ford shaking his head, but I recollect that he was one of the key proponents of the "Yes" campaign and the referendum that supported the institutions that we have today, albeit, thankfully, updated, improved and amended since St Andrews.

However, those arrangements are transitional, and I look forward to the day when we can have a proper, functioning, democratic system in Northern Ireland.

12.45 pm

Mr McNarry: Proper?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Yes, Mr McNarry, you supported this system, too. Your party created this system, and your party is responsible for what we have today at Stormont, so do not try to walk away from it now and act holier than thou —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not normally necessary to ask the junior Minister to address his remarks through the Chair, but I ask him to do so.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I am simply responding to points that were made in the debate, and I will continue to do so. If Members wish to criticise the process, let them also remember that they fathered the process. They created the very process of which this Bill is a product, whether they like it or not. Therefore, we will not take any lectures on hypocrisy, double standards and how this process works. We are doing the best with what we inherited, and we are doing our best to make this process work for the people of Northern Ireland. We are doing our best to clear up the mess that others created in the first place.
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to be heard.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

In his remarks, Mr Kennedy described the Bill as a grimy compromise. He would know all about grimy compromises, because he belongs to a party, the First Minister of which resigned and then, all of a sudden, “un-resigned”. Talk about a grimy compromise.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You have mentioned several times that Members must keep to the business at hand. Is there any chance that we could keep to the business at hand now, rather than be subjected to a history lesson?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I agree that it would be useful to keep to the business at hand.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Since Mr McCrea wandered all over the place during his remarks — backwards and forwards, inside out and upside down — I will listen to no lectures from him about avoiding history lessons. Of course, Mr McCrea does not have much history when it comes to dealing with the victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. As I reminded him last week, Mr McCrea is a ceasefire politician. He put his head above the parapet when the fighting was over — when the battle was finished, up popped Mr McCrea. He may well have won the BBC ‘Politics Show’ newcomer of the year award, but, as far as we are concerned, he is the latecomer of the year when it comes to dealing with the victims of violence.

My party has been dealing with this issue for years, and it will continue to deal with it, because it puts the victims first. It is our party that is bringing forward this Bill. It is the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that is delivering for victims, where others failed to do so when they held those positions. They failed, and miserably so.

I recall that, when I was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, I presented the then First Minister and leader of the party, David Trimble, with a paper on the need for a victims’ commission. That paper was ignored, and Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party failed to deliver for the victims. Therefore, we will take no lectures from Mr Kennedy or Mr McCrea, because their record of dealing with this issue is, frankly, lamentable —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Kennedy: Join the Provos.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Kennedy, I ask you to withdraw that remark.

Mr Kennedy: The remark is withdrawn.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I remind Mr Kennedy that I put on the uniform of the Crown to fight the Provos, and that members of my family died in that fight. I am glad that we are in a better place today and that we have a relative degree of peace and stability. There was a dreadful incident last night in Tyrone, and we all pray that that young man — [*Interruption.*]

I regret that Mr Kennedy seems to want to interrupt my condemnation of acts of violence. Does he not at least have the decency to allow me to condemn an act of violence without interrupting me? We all condemn last night’s act of violence, and we do not want any more victims to be created in Northern Ireland.

Mr McNarry: You have lost the plot, Jeffrey.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I have not lost the plot, Mr McNarry. The people who lost the plot in 1998 were the people who voted to open the gates of the Maze Prison and let the murderers out on to the streets. Do not lecture me about losing the plot. The people who lost the plot —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I honestly believe that this has gone too far. We are not talking to the Bill at all, and that is to be highly regretted.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I take your point, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I note that the continuous interruptions and interventions from a sedentary position go unchecked, and, therefore, somebody has to deal with them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: If you check the Hansard report tomorrow, I think that you will see that I have had to intervene a record number of times.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have been interrupted on a number of occasions, and it has been me who has been asked to come to order, not others.

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not the case that, when the junior Minister speaks, he is speaking on behalf of OFMDFM, and not on behalf of the DUP or, indeed, himself?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the junior Minister please continue?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): I would not be a junior Minister if I were not a member of the Democratic Unionist Party — and I do not divorce myself from my party, except when it goes the wrong way. *[Laughter.]*

There is much more that I could say about the contributions that were made — some of which, quite frankly, are unworthy of comment. Mr Basil McCrea spoke of a cosy coalition. May I remind the Member that the Ulster Unionist Party is part of the coalition Government in Northern Ireland — a coalition Government that it helped to design. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Will Members please allow the Minister to speak?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): The reality is that I am working in a joint office that was created by the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and others. We do our best to try to reach a consensus on very difficult issues, and I regret that we were not able to achieve a broader consensus in this Chamber on these issues. I assure Members that that was our objective in the amendments that we tabled, which were designed to address concerns that Members had raised, and to do so in a way that enabled us to move this legislation forward with the broadest possible consensus.

I welcome the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party has indicated that it will vote for the Bill; the SDLP will abstain; and I am not sure about the Alliance Party, which, I believe, indicated that it will vote against the Bill at this Stage. We have achieved at least some degree of consensus, even if it is not the broadest possible.

What matters now is to ensure that the commission can deliver for the victims of violence. However, this House, too, has a continuing role in addressing the needs and concerns of victims, as have the Executive, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and other Ministers.

This has, at times, been a heated debate, but I recognise that this is an emotive issue that goes to the heart of where we have come from and how we deal with the past. I accept Mr Attwood's points. I say to him, in relation to the Eames/Bradley process, that my party will co-operate fully, as it has done. We have met the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past on

several occasions. I understand that Sinn Féin has also had a number of meetings with the group.

What the First Minister and deputy First Minister cannot do at this stage is pre-empt the outcome of the group's report. We must wait for its recommendation and consider where we stand on them. The Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past was established not by this House, not by the Executive, but by the Northern Ireland Office, and is, to a certain extent therefore, outwith the devolution process. Therefore, we have to see where that process goes in order to determine the role of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and their Department, when it comes to implementing the group's recommendations.

Mr Attwood: I did not suggest that the junior Minister's Office should pre-empt the findings of the Eames/Bradley group. I asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in a question for written answer, AQW 4703/08:

"to confirm that (i) it will co-operate fully and in all matters with the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past and (ii) it will encourage all groups and individuals to co-operate also".

There was silence in reply.

I was trying to probe whether that silence endured or whether Mr Donaldson's party, as opposed to OFMDFM, would now co-operate fully with the Eames/Bradley group. People are encouraged to co-operate with inquiries into criminal activity; therefore, does he not agree that it would be helpful if his party were to send out a clear message to the people by co-operating with the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past, without fear, favour or prejudice?

The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson): We are already doing that. I have nothing further to add on what we are already doing.

I thank the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its involvement in the process. There were problems because some Committee members were opposed to accelerated passage and would have preferred a full Committee Stage. However, we have now reached the stage where it is to be hoped that the Bill will be passed by the House and enacted as law. That will enable the commission to get on with its work.

We support the commission in its work. Members stated clearly that they will assist the commission, and that is important. We all represent constituencies in which there are victims and survivors, and people who are living with the legacy of more than three decades of violence. Dolores Kelly said that victims' interests remain prejudiced by a lack of consensus and failure of leadership. We may not have achieved the level of consensus that we would like, but at least we can now go forward, showing leadership.

I hope that we can end this debate on a positive note. Despite our differences about whether the commission is adequate, we should all resolve to do our best to make it work for the good of the people who need its help. It is to be hoped that the commission, the strategy and the other work that is yet to be done will deliver for those who have waited for a long time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill (NIA 12/07) do now pass.

The sitting was suspended at 12.58 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair) —

2.02 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Post-Primary Transfer

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose, and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Three amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose, and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech.

Mr B McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly, given high levels of public concern, calls on the Executive to create a Ministerial Sub-Committee to recommend appropriate regulations to govern post-primary transfer from 2010.

From the outset, I wish to explicitly outline that the motion is not about the policy options on post-primary transfer that the Minister of Education is pursuing. It is not about determining which system replaces the 11-plus, nor is it about the Minister's belief that academic selection must be abandoned. It is about establishing a process to resolve a contentious issue.

Debates on the subject of matching pupils with appropriate post-primary schools take place throughout the United Kingdom and in many other jurisdictions — it is a normal part of politics. Such debate is good and healthy, and clarifies how proposals will progress. However, debate is not a substitute for action — that is the problem with the Assembly's current position.

On 9 May 2007, within two days of the Minister's taking office, she said:

“Over the coming months we will need to address major issues such as academic selection”.

The months passed until, in December 2007, seven months after the Minister's pledge to address major issues, the House received a vague outline — and “outline” is the word that the Minister used — with no substantive proposals for the future. Almost one year to the day later, there are still no proposals. Loyal members of the Minister's party — who are massed on the Benches, ready to retaliate — will, undoubtedly, inform the House that an announcement is imminent. Stand by your beds — all will be revealed shortly. The trouble with that is that it is all too late.

Few Members would be surprised if the Minister did not cobble something together at this late stage — almost anything in fact, to get us out of this debacle. It would not be a surprise if the Minister suddenly, and against all previous protestations, were to discover that the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) was capable of and willing to accommodate some form of academic criteria and would be able to formulate an acceptable transfer test. It would not be a surprise if the Minister decided after all that academic criteria, rather than being some form of inherent evil to be eradicated in 2010, could be allowed to continue for a period of transition. Frankly, there is no other way out of this mess.

It would not be a surprise, if having made that decision and wasted a year, the Minister suddenly decided that legislation would have to be pushed through by way of accelerated passage. If we are guessing correctly, that would be a tragedy — it would be a sad state of affairs for schoolchildren and their parents across Northern Ireland.

Bearing in mind all that has happened, it is no surprise that a recent poll in 'The Irish News' revealed that 93·3% of school principals did not obtain sufficient information from the Minister of Education to allow them to formulate their plans. That is an incredible figure — nine out of 10 principals. All the primary school principals whom I met during a recent visit to Cookstown told me of their worries about that lack of information.

If the Minister has failed the schools and their principals, she has also failed parents. A 'Belfast Telegraph' poll revealed that only 22% of parents had confidence in the Minister's ability to deliver policies in time that would suit them. A full two thirds — 66% — of parents of children in the age group that was most likely to be affected said that they did not understand the Minister's plans. Therefore, there is no understanding about what will happen in the very near future.

Parents have the primary responsibility for guiding their children through education. Ironically, the Minister told us in the statement that she made in the House on 4 December 2007 that parental guidance would play a significant role in any new arrangements. How can parental guidance be used if no one knows what the framework is? How can anyone be guided if they do not know where they are going?

The clock is ticking. It has been one year since the restoration of devolution. There is only one academic year to go, but the Minister has failed to provide the clarity that is necessary for parents to play their proper role in the education system. The figures that I quoted demonstrate unequivocally that the Minister of Education has completely lost the trust of two key groups — parents and principals. The competence of the Minister

is being questioned not only in this House and in the Committee for Education, but throughout our entire society. In any other jurisdiction that would be cause for concern, but, apparently, that is not the case here.

The Minister said that she has been seeking consensus. Let me tell her, Mr Deputy Speaker, that she has achieved it. Everyone across society and across the education stakeholders agrees. Irrespective of their views on academic selection or post-primary transfer, people believe that the Minister is failing our children, their parents and their schools.

Perhaps the greatest indication of the abject failure of Sinn Féin's Minister of Education is that she pledged to destroy academic selection, but is now presiding over independent academic selection in several academic schools. That happened on the Minister's watch, but it did not have to happen. The principals of the post-primary schools that are involved in the move towards independent academic selection have done so with the utmost reluctance. One of them said that they had been:

"forced down this road due to the lack of movement and lack of information from the minister... I cannot emphasise enough that this is not the way we want to go but we feel we are left with no option because of a lack of information and the intransigence of the minister".

Let me state clearly that I, and others, have previously spoken on the record about the issue. No-one wants independent entrance tests; they are a measure of last resort. However, the Minister has created that situation, the irony of which cannot be missed. The Minister has condemned the entrance-test plan as "elitist", but it has happened on her watch; she is responsible for the emergence of independent transfer tests.

Like every Minister in the Executive, the Minister of Education has taken the Pledge of Office, which includes the obligation to serve all the people of Northern Ireland. Therefore, a Minister is not a mere spokesman for a political party. She or he has a solemn responsibility to put Northern Ireland first — ahead of his or her party. However, since the restoration of devolution, we have witnessed a Minister of Education acting as though her role was no more than that of spokesman for Sinn Féin following an exclusively Sinn Féin agenda.

Northern Ireland deserves better. The children, parents, teachers and schools of Northern Ireland deserve better. They deserve an Education Minister who will not allow her party political agenda always to trump her wider obligations and responsibilities.

An Executive subcommittee is merely a mechanism for ensuring that the Education Minister delivers on her wider obligations and responsibilities. I should be happy to hear of any other channels through which that might be done. It is telling that the Minister views the Executive subcommittee as a threat. Time and again we have asked her to bring her proposals for discussion. It is not as though that is abnormal. Executive

subcommittees are routinely used to address significant issues that require political consensus. That is why they were used for the review of public administration and for Planning Policy Statement 14 (PPS 14). They are a perfectly normal way of dealing with such matters.

Using an Executive subcommittee would have several benefits. First, it would instil public confidence in a vital area of education policy, demonstrating that the Executive are determined to chart collectively a way forward that will have maximum cross-community support. Secondly, it would erase the impression that a narrow partisan agenda is intent on provoking discord and educational chaos. Thirdly, it would show that the Minister of Education has given up destructive solo runs, abandoned her hostility towards those who dare to disagree with her, and finally accepted that children and parents must come first, rather than her narrow partisan agenda. I urge Members to support the motion.

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

Mrs O'Neill: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"notes that the Minister of Education is to present proposals on post-primary transfer to the Executive on Thursday 15th May and agrees to await the outcome of those discussions."

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin has proposed this amendment because, despite what Basil McCrea has said, it is not too late for the Minister to put forward proposals. Given that Caitríona Ruane, the Minister of Education, plans to attend the Executive on Thursday to share her proposals on the way forward for transfer, the motion is basically outdated, and there is no reason for it.

I do not agree with Basil that the Minister's action is too late. She has gone through the process; she set out her vision and went through intensive negotiations and discussions with education stakeholders. As a result of that consultation, we have arrived where we are today, and the Minister intends to present her proposals to the Executive and, shortly afterwards, to the Committee for Education.

The motion detracts from the real debate. Instead of discussing the ins and outs of the post-primary debate, we are dealing again with the political games of the UUP, which simply does not agree with the direction in which the Minister is going. The Minister's proposals will become clear, are visionary and will ensure that all of our kids have the best educational future and the best outcomes, whether of an academic or vocational nature. Sinn Féin recognises academic excellence, but it recognises equally that some children are more suited to vocational education. Let us not let those children down or deem them lower achievers as they travel down their paths.

It appears that the UUP wants to bypass the normal democratic process by setting up the ministerial subcom-

mittee. One clear fact seems to be missing: Caitríona Ruane is the Minister of Education and has responsibility for introducing and setting policy on education.

UUP Members may not like that situation, and have therefore tried through the motion to weaken the position and powers of the Minister by establishing a subcommittee to bring forward regulations. However, all parties in the Chamber need to be mindful of the implications. Do they want to set a precedent on taking control away from Ministers by establishing, on a willy-nilly basis, groups that will take decisions out of Ministers' hands?

2.15 pm

Mr S Wilson: The intention is not to take anything out of Ministers' hands. This is a tried and tested method within the Executive for resolving difficult issues. Arlene Foster used it in respect of the review of public administration. Indeed, as far as the Education Minister is concerned, her colleague, Conor Murphy, also used it in relation to water charges. This is not a case of trying to undermine anyone; it is simply a case of trying to find a more acceptable way of bringing things forward.

Mrs O'Neill: I have no problem with subcommittees being set up on cross-departmental issues; however, this issue relates purely to education.

The consequence of agreeing to the motion will be to take power away from Ministers. If the Members who proposed the motion were logical thinkers, they would accept amendment No 1, because that would send a message to the electorate that they are not playing games with the issue.

On Thursday, when the Executive considers the Minister's proposals, I hope that we will move to the final stage in transforming the education system so that all children and young people are treated equally and given every support to succeed.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"regrets the delay in decision-making on post-primary educational reform and the resulting high levels of public concern and damage to public confidence; and calls on the Minister of Education to publish forthwith her proposals on Transfer, Sustainable Schools and Area-based planning."

The Minister has told us that changes in education have to be managed carefully. One way of doing so would be by providing people with clear information about the changes planned. When people know how change will be achieved, and the logical steps taking them to that point, they know where they are going. However, when people are kept in the dark and are denied information, or have information drip-fed to them, they naturally become anxious and begin to lose faith in reform. That is exactly what has happened in the case of education reform. There has been a dearth

of information, detail has not been forthcoming and the public have lost faith.

More importantly, parents have lost faith: they are wondering what lies in store for the children who are in primary 5. Teachers have lost faith because they have not been in a position to answer the questions that parents ask them day and daily at the school gate. Sadly, that anxiety has filtered through to the pupils themselves.

Because of the information vacuum in which change is being implemented — or not implemented — the situation is being described, understandably, as a mess. The Minister has told us time and again that she has consulted with key stakeholders. However, the key stakeholders in this process are the parents who do not know what lies in store for their children — particularly the parents of the first cohort, the primary-5 children.

Supporters of reform have been bewildered by the way in which the process has been managed, and they can see clearly that reform has been undermined as a result. The history of the process has been that the Minister has only been forthcoming with information when the Assembly was demanded to know what was happening.

One wonders what the Minister's plan was. It was certainly not to keep everyone informed with the maximum amount of information during every step in the process. Why has that been the case? I see no strategic advantage in the Minister's approach. It has not convinced the opponents of reform and has only served to weaken whatever consensus existed already around transfer at age 14. It looks very much like the Minister is making things up as she goes along, and she cannot provide answers because she does not have them herself.

At this late stage, as we face another school year, major policy areas have not been clarified. The effects on local people on the ground following the ending of the transfer test will not be known for a considerable time because key policies are not yet in place.

In the emerging situation, the future of transfer is inextricably linked to area-based planning, and area-based planning is inextricably linked to the sustainable-schools policy.

However, we still do not have clear guidelines on those policies. When will we have those? Will the drip feed of information continue, creating more uncertainty and anxiety among parents and pupils?

On Tuesday 4 March, the Minister informed the Assembly that she was implementing processes and structures to take forward an area-based approach to post-primary provision — area-based planning. However, two months later, no significant detail is available. We have not yet seen the terms of reference or the guidelines for area-based planning, even though consultation is to

be complete by 9 January. One wonders whether that target date can be met, given the fact that the local groups have not yet been established as we approach the end of another school year.

If previous experience is anything to go by, even after consultation has ended, we will have to wait for the Minister's response. That response will probably come some time afterwards, and very late for parents to grapple with as they attempt to choose schools for the first cohort of children to transfer without academic selection.

There are many questions about area-based planning and sustainable schools that must be answered. The Minister is due to present a paper to the Executive on Thursday of this week. I believe that that paper is already in the hands of the press, before the Executive and Members of the House have seen it. I do not know what is in that paper but — for the sake of parents, teachers and members of the education community — I hope that it will contain the required detail on the areas of policy that I have outlined.

I appreciate the concerns of those who have proposed both the substantive motion and the Alliance Party amendment. However, I do not agree that the creation of an Executive subcommittee is the best way to deal with those concerns. The Minister is responsible for education, and our job, as Members of the Assembly, is to hold the Minister to account. We must ensure that she provides parents and teachers with the information on key policy areas that they require. To kick this issue into Executive touch would free the Minister of accountability, and allow her to hide under the skirts of an Executive subcommittee.

My amendment seeks to hold the Minister to account and to force her to face up to her responsibilities to parents, pupils and teachers. I ask Members to support my amendment. Ending the current transfer system affects — and is of concern to — people on the ground. We have still not seen the terms of reference for key policies. Even after the end of consultation, we will probably have to wait for clarity on those policies. I ask the Members to support amendment No 2. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Lunn: I beg to move amendment No 3: At end insert

‘, in the event that the Minister fails to bring forward detailed proposals for full consideration by the Assembly.’

The motion raises an important issue in its mention of “public concern”. Obviously, there is considerable public concern about what the Minister views as the way forward. The Minister's proposals must be carefully thought out and capable of implementation. We reluctantly accept the Minister's explanation for the long delay as she consulted with every interested stakeholder in the education sector. However, perhaps, enough is enough.

As we know, the Minister will bring her proposals to the Executive in two days' time. Therefore, the timing of the motion is unfortunate. The motion would have had more relevance if it had been introduced some weeks or months ago.

The unionist parties have used every opportunity to put pressure on the Minister. The proposal of this motion is another novel way of bringing this matter before the House. However, surely they recognise, deep in their hearts, that the Executive will not create another subcommittee for the purpose demanded by the motion — if for no other reason than it would allow the Minister to get away with not doing her job.

Furthermore, the amendment is impossible to implement without the Minister's consent, and there is little chance that that will be forthcoming. The motion asks for the impossible, and it serves no purpose, except as an expression of frustration and righteous anger from the Ulster Unionist Benches. Basil McCrea was eight minutes and 40 seconds into his speech before he even mentioned the Executive subcommittee — until then, his speech was merely just such an expression.

The Alliance Party takes a more moderate approach. The delay has been frustrating for us as well, but how much more frustrating has it been for the pupils, parents and teachers whose interests should be at the centre of the debate? They deserve to know what is proposed, as 2010 comes ever closer.

The reason why the Alliance Party tabled the amendment may be found in the Sinn Féin document which came to light some weeks ago, and which raised concerns that the Minister might be considering an approach designed to bypass the Assembly. I do not know whether such a tactic is possible. I look forward to the Minister's comments on that matter, and I hope for her reassurance that that idea has been discounted.

There is only one means of agreeing the way forward: it is absolutely paramount that, whatever the proposals are, they are laid before the Assembly for full scrutiny. Any attempt to avoid full debate — including a request for accelerated passage — is unacceptable and will not succeed.

Our motion sets no timescale, but the end of June marks the absolute time limit for action. I welcome the fact that the Minister will brief her Executive colleagues this week, and I look forward to her presenting the same proposals, very quickly afterwards, to the Assembly. If the Minister does that, she will prove that there is nowhere to hide for those who pretend that there is no need for change, no need for equality or no means of progress. If she fails to do that, it will appear that she is the one with something to hide. She must realise that.

I will comment briefly on the other two amendments. First, I shall address the amendment standing in the

name of Michelle O'Neill. Mr Deputy Speaker, I have no wish to question your decision on this matter, but we have before us an amendment that removes all but the first three words of a motion, and effectively replaces the original motion with another. Having said that, the proposal that we should patiently await the outcome of the Executive's discussions holds no appeal for my party. We have been patient long enough. The amendment is irrelevant to the original motion.

The amendment in the name of Mr and Mrs Bradley — *[Laughter.]*

That amendment totally changes the meaning of the original motion, and merely calls on the Minister to publish her proposals "forthwith". We all want that to happen; we do not need to debate that proposal.

Our amendment seeks assurance from the Minister that full debate in the House will be facilitated. Such an assurance will be warmly welcomed by the Alliance Party. I could quote Winston Churchill, who famously referred to "the end of the beginning" and "the beginning of the end". I hope that, whatever happens to this motion — which is not all that relevant — the Minister's expected announcement will mark the beginning of the end of this process, and that we will achieve what we all want: a modern, fair, education system that is fit for purpose, relevant to the modern world and the needs of the community, and something of which we can be proud. If that can be brought about, all this will have been worthwhile.

We are seeking action and reassurance from the Minister about the post-primary process, and we want it no later than the end of June.

Mr S Wilson: I could use the debate for political knockabout, to which I know the Minister would immediately respond. She would get mad and jump up and down, and we could have a bit of fun with her. There is plenty of material: recent polls in the newspapers show that she is perceived as the worst-performing Minister, and there is a rich vein of imagery that could be tapped. It could be alleged that she and I are the Jack and Vera Duckworth of the Assembly. I could draw many parallels between the hectoring, lecturing, hen-pecking Vera — who has been written out of the script — but I am not going to do that.

As other Members have said, this issue is one that we need to address, and address seriously.

2.30 pm

I have three things to say to the Minister. First, it has become obvious from opinion polls and other sources that although, by virtue of her position, she has the first degree of control on this issue, it is an issue on which this Assembly is going to be judged. It is significant that when, on the first birthday of this Assembly, people were making adverse comments, the one area that they

zoned in on time and time again was education. Although that may be regarded as something of an accusation against the Minister, nevertheless the Assembly itself will suffer if it is not addressed. That is why it is imperative that all of us put pressure on the Minister to move in the right direction.

My second point is that there is need for agreement with other parties. The Assembly heard a debate earlier today on the victims' commission, and we have previously heard debates about the RPA, councils, the Budget and a whole range of other issues. The one thing that strikes me about all those debates was that we had Ministers who were willing to engage with other parties; there has been the ability to reach agreement.

I am aware that the Minister and I are poles apart ideologically on this matter. The Minister wants a system based on economic and social selection, whereas I want a system based on educational merit and ability. Despite this, we must find a way of reaching an agreement. My position on academic selection has been copper-fastened in the St Andrews Agreement. As a result of that agreement, those schools that wish to retain academic selection will have the opportunity to do so and to apply it as they see fit. However, I would much prefer that we had a system, agreed to by the entire Assembly, that regularises in law whatever the transfer arrangements are going to be. That is something towards which we must work.

Reference has been made today to the Minister's proposals. There are some things there on which we can work together, but, equally, the Minister has to give cognisance to those of us who believe that schools that wish to remain as specialist academic schools should have the ability to choose youngsters who best suit what they have to offer.

My third point relates to the motion put forward by Basil McCrea. This motion is not an attempt to snatch away responsibility from the Minister and give it to somebody else. Ministerial subcommittees have been tried previously on difficult issues in this Assembly and have succeeded.

Notwithstanding Michelle O'Neill's response to my intervention, this is a good example of a policy that would fit into the Executive Committee, because it is cross-cutting — it affects the Departments of Finance and Personnel, Employment and Learning, and Education. Therefore, there are good grounds for taking a cross-party and cross-ministerial approach on this to reach agreement. It is quite clear that, after one year in office, the Minister has not been capable by herself of reaching agreement and bringing forward a proposal.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up, and he can go back to the Rover's Return.

Miss McIlveen: It is perhaps worthy of mention that Sinn Féin is reshuffling its Education Committee

members. Wednesday O'Neill remains, but Pugsley Butler has been deemed not naughty enough, and so the Adams family has now drafted in good old faithful Lurch in an attempt to disguise his Minister's failings while she tries to prune the bloom of our education system.

Given the growing frequency of the Member for Upper Bann's contributions during education debates and his predecessor's inability to adequately defend the indefensible actions of his Minister — although he must be applauded for giving it a go — it comes as no surprise that he is joining the Committee for Education.

I congratulate the Ulster Unionist Party for tabling the motion. It clearly got the idea from a DUP Minister who suggested it at an Executive meeting. Since the Ulster Unionist Party is promoting DUP proposals, I have no hesitation in supporting the motion.

I have concerns, however, about the amendments, particularly those tabled by Sinn Féin and the SDLP. It is clear that the Minister is incapable of bringing the situation regarding post-primary transfer to a conclusion by herself. I appreciate the spirit in which the Alliance Party's amendment was tabled, but it does not provide a definitive timescale. It will, therefore, allow the Minister to wangle her way out of a difficult situation.

It is apparent to me and, undoubtedly, to others in the Chamber and to the many dozens of constituents, teachers and parents that I have spoken to in the past year, that the Minister is hopelessly out of her depth. Sinn Féin is faced with a terrible dilemma: lose face by replacing her, or lose support by keeping her. If it were not for the damage that she is doing to the confidence of teachers and parents, and the waste of resources that she funnels into her pet projects, I would tell them to keep her in position.

Some 90% of the schools surveyed by 'The Irish News' said that they did not have enough information from the Minister on the future of education in Northern Ireland post-11, so it is obvious that the Minister has lost the confidence of teachers. Only 24 out of 90 principals said that they had confidence in her. I am surprised that the figure was as high as 24, since most of them felt that they were being kept in the dark. Perhaps they enjoy the Minister's mushroom-farming approach to education reform. Only one quarter of primary school principals thought that a workable system would be put in place — that is hardly a ringing endorsement.

We are six months away from the final 11-plus test, but we are no clearer on what the Minister wants to put in its place. Confusion abounds. The Minister tells us about the wonderful public meetings that she attends, at which everyone tells her what a great job she is doing. They do not sound anything like the public meetings that I have attended. Perhaps she is sitting

with an iPod and listening to her own reassurances on some kind of loop.

Parents, teachers and primary 5 pupils do not know what is happening. It is fortunate that a significant proportion of grammar schools has stepped up to the mark and taken advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by the DUP at St Andrews by proposing a new common entrants test. It is not an ideal situation or a perfect solution, but, in the absence of anything coming from the Minister, it is the best option on the table.

In response to that proposal, the Minister goes on the attack. First, she says that she will not fund the test; subsequently, she says that the schools cannot use departmental funds to defend any appeals; and, finally, she calls those schools elitist. That is no way to win friends and influence people. Of course, there must be one grammar school in Newry that is not elitist.

The longer that the Minister dithers and fails to achieve any form of agreement, the more she chooses to ignore the role of the Committee for Education. As uncertainty continues to grow, more schools will opt to set entrance exams, and the Minister may find that the decision taken by Lumen Christi is merely the tip of a large Catholic-maintained-sector iceberg.

We need action now and solid proposals that can be discussed. The Minister is unable to deliver consensus, and the best way of achieving that is by establishing a ministerial subcommittee.

Mr Deputy Speaker: For a while, I thought that I was going to be referred to as Thing. Speaking of whom, I call Mr Storey.

Mr Storey: I would not refer to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, in such a derogatory fashion; others might, but I would not.

Yet again, the motion being debated puts the Minister of Education at the crossroads. There is a sense of déjà vu; we have been here so many times, and the same arguments have been repeated many times, but, unfortunately, we still get the same response from the Minister. She does not listen, and she is not interested in taking notes when Members are speaking so that she can give a comprehensive, detailed response to what is being said. No doubt the Minister will again read from the prepared script, and there will be no deviation from that. That is how it goes with this Minister.

At the heart of the debate is the belief that time has run out for Caitríona Ruane after months of her prevaricating on the future of post-primary selection. That is why I have some difficulties with the Alliance Party's amendment, which could be viewed as letting the Minister off the hook. I assure Members that that is the last thing that Members on this side of the House want to do, and I think that that is the general consensus

in the Chamber. I suspect that it is probably the general consensus in her own party.

It has been one year since the restoration of devolution, and Caitríona Ruane's scorecard does not read well. We have had a full year of her dithering, stalling, lecturing us about clarity, consultation and equality of opportunity, and making changes and revisions. The Minister has failed to impress because she has failed to lead and failed to convince anyone — even those in her own party — that she has the ability to lead. The recent poll in the 'Belfast Telegraph' clearly showed that 64% of Sinn Féin supporters believe that there should be some form of academic selection. The Minister will try to dismiss that and argue about it, but statistics can be very stubborn, and that statistic is one that she should not ignore.

My colleague Michelle McIlveen referred to the Sinn Féin reshuffle. That reshuffle was all about trying to save face for Caitríona Ruane and trying to spare her any embarrassment. We welcome Mr O'Dowd, the former chef, to the education kitchen. No doubt his party thinks that he can prepare a new menu that will be more palatable for us, but, alas, he will still be using the same ingredients, which will not include academic selection.

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree that that kitchen would be in grave danger of being closed down by environmental health for using those ingredients?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his intervention; I was going to go on to say that that meal would have to carry a health warning, and it certainly would not be supported by Jamie Oliver, who would come to the conclusion that it was a recipe for disaster. As the saying goes, you can rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic, but it will still go down. That can be applied to what is, in this case, the wrong policy.

Sinn Féin has tried to give us all sorts of reasons to explain why Paul Butler has been sidelined and John O'Dowd has been brought in. We know that that is because Sinn Féin is divided on the issue, and the results of the 'Belfast Telegraph' poll indicate clearly that Sinn Féin does not have the support of its own community.

It is probably an insult to Basil McCrea's ego that Sinn Féin has brought in someone who has more of an insight into education than he does. When one listens to Basil, one would think that he was the fountain of all knowledge when it comes to these issues. Obviously, there will be a bit of a contest the first time that those Members meet in the Committee for Education, and we look forward to that battle.

My advice to the Minister is very simple and very clear: if she cannot stand the heat, she should take off her head chef's hat and get out of the kitchen. Doing so would be a service to education. Everyone knows that the Minister is opposed to the 11-plus, but no one

knows what is she is prepared to put in its place. Reference has been made to the consultation that the DUP has undertaken on this issue — we have gone out to the country and have approached parents, school teachers and boards of governors. No one who has come to those well-attended public meetings has told us that the Minister is on the right course. But that is nothing new, because Sinn —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The egg timer has run its course, and the Member's time is up.

Mr Storey: I support the motion.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a governor of Glynn Primary School, where I and other governors work in a voluntary capacity to further the interests of the children, teachers and the school generally. It is important that our focal point in this debate should be the pupils who will be affected, their parents, those who work in the teaching community, and the turmoil that they currently face.

2.45 pm

It is regrettable that, despite one year having passed since the restoration of devolution, no firm proposals about the future of post-primary education have been brought to the Assembly, or, for that matter, to the Committee for Education.

A child's education is precious, and it is so for his or her parents. The degree of concern that exists is unsurprising. I — like all other Members, I suspect — have been approached by parents who, because of the current void, are concerned about their children's futures.

As my colleagues highlighted, the Minister of Education has repeatedly delayed publishing definitive proposals about the future of post-primary education. Instead, we have been told of vague visions that contained very little detail. The Minister has often said that, over the coming months, she will take various actions. However, to date, nothing has happened. Time and patience have run out.

As other Members said, the public's concern has been evident through the media, including in editorials, letters pages, opinion pieces and radio phone-ins. It is important that action is taken.

The Minister should be reminded that it is not simply a matter of her issuing a statement; the Assembly's cross-community support for legislation is required. To date, little attempt has been made to garner the support that may enable the passage of such legislation.

As I said earlier, education is vital to every child's future, but it is also vital to the future of the Northern Ireland economy. Therefore, the issue affects not only individual children, but the long-term future of citizens in Northern Ireland.

As I said, no serious attempt has been made to secure widespread support. Given that the Minister has a difficult relationship with the Committee for Education, a ministerial subcommittee would be a suitable forum in which to discuss the problems with post-primary education, reach some form of consensus and find a constructive solution.

Some Members are of the view that such a subcommittee is not required. I remind them that many ministerial subcommittees have been created over the past year to consider various issues, including domestic and sexual violence, children and young people, flooding incidents in 2007, a review of water and sewerage, the RPA, and PPS 14.

It is nonsense to say that post-primary education is not a cross-cutting issue. It is clear that interaction with DEL is required. Furthermore, given the impact that education has on the economy, DETI should also be involved. As others said, a huge financial cost is involved in reshaping the educational fabric and in how our young people are educated. A significant proportion of the Budget is spent on education. I contend that issues that involve the post-primary transfer have an impact on many other Departments, and it is, therefore, logical to include them in any discussions that take place. A degree of consensus would have to be reached in any ministerial subcommittee, and that could then be taken to the Committee for Education, and, ultimately, to the Assembly.

I went to Queen's University, and I remember having to do a brief test that involved a team-building exercise. The outcome of that test was that the collective wisdom of the group was greater than that of any individual. I suggest that the Minister takes those thoughts on board.

Learning partnerships exist throughout Northern Ireland, and those often include the further education sector. Indeed, I am aware of a case in my constituency in which the University of Ulster is involved.

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

Mr Beggs: I urge the Minister to progress the issue constructively by establishing a ministerial subcommittee.

Mrs M Bradley: Having been charged with delivering a new Northern Ireland that is equal and better for everyone who lives here, Members are in a unique position to act.

The Minister said:

"equality is my watchword; equality of access and equality of educational opportunity." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 26, p7, col 2*].

She also said:

"the draft Programme for Government is explicit in declaring that the watchwords of the Executive, in delivering all its policies

and programmes, will be fairness, inclusion and equality.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 26, p10, col 1].

There has been no sign of inclusion in this matter, because the Committee has had to delve and beg for information in order to answer many questions from constituents. Fairness and equality are important in all the processes for which the Executive are responsible. It is vital that our children and their parents and teachers are informed about a process of change and the future of the education system.

The Minister stated that the transfer from primary to post-primary education should be as seamless as possible. However, thus far, the alleged blueprint has been elusive, and the missing programme for change has not been available. Regrettably, the fundamental necessities for achieving change without chaos are invisible in this saga. It is neither fair nor preferable that this situation of limbo is allowed to continue to trundle on without a resolution. That is what will happen unless details concerning the transfer procedure, area planning and sustainable schools are made available.

We are fewer than six weeks away from the end of term, which should herald a carefree few months for children, parents and teachers in Northern Ireland. However, the vibe — and I declare an interest as a school governor — that those of us who sit on boards of governors are getting is that the summer does not look anything like a period of relaxation, but a summer of discontent, with only more confusion to look forward to in the absence of key policies.

The stakeholders in education are parents, teachers and children. The Minister said that she had far-reaching discussions with all the stakeholders. She should be no stranger to the many concerns that teachers have. The very fact that area-based planning is to be the basis for post-primary entrants is of huge concern to educators.

Dominic Bradley — my colleague, not my husband — [Laughter.]

Dominic's first profession was teaching, and he has been forthright and justified in his detailed approach to this debate. There is no need for me to reiterate his concerns. It is important to clarify that those concerns are not personal; they are a true and honest reflection of the concerns that have been put, on a daily basis, to us as public representatives.

An Executive subcommittee is not the way to resolve this issue. The Minister of Education is the person responsible — it is her responsibility to act, and urgent action is required. There has been too much delay thus far. The Minister must end the confusion and dispel the lack of clarity. She must publish the details of the future transfer procedure. Her paper to the Executive this Thursday must outline the details of the transfer procedure, area planning and sustainable

schools. Without those key policies, the lack of clarity and the state of confusion will continue and will ferment. Parents, pupils and teachers will not be reassured — they will only be further disturbed.

I hope that the Minister has got the message by now. I hope that she will end the confusion by publishing her policies on all three important elements of reform without any further delay. Parents, teachers and children deserve that much, at least. I support amendment No 2.

Mr McCausland: In dealing with the issue of post-primary transfer, the Minister is facing her first major test. When one considers how she has performed in that test, her performance has been marked by delay, procrastination, confusion and confrontation. Her entire manner indicates that she is much more suited to be a Minister of confrontation than a Minister of Education.

The Minister talked, as did other Members, about a shared future. That is one of the positive measures that this Assembly is considering — how a cross-community consensus and an agreement for the future can be created. One can certainly say that Caitríona Ruane has contributed to that. Due to her attitude, she has created a consensus that is quite unique — teachers, principals, parents, unionists, nationalists, people in the east of the Province, and people in the west all share a common view. It does not matter to whom one talks or where one goes, there is a cross-community consensus that she is simply incompetent and incapable of doing the job. She has at least managed to create a consensus around her incompetence.

It must also be noted that in dealing with the issue, the Minister told us that she carried out consultation and sought to build consensus by going out and speaking to this person, that person and the other person. However, when the Committee listened to folk who came along to tell of their experiences, it found that there had been no genuine consultation. The Committee was given a presentation recently by a group from the education sector who, when questioned, said that there had been a meeting way back a year or so ago, but nothing since then. That meeting might have been with a political adviser, but there was no real engagement with the Minister. Nevertheless, those are people who hold important positions, as key stakeholders in the education sector.

Although there has been much talk about consultation and consensus, those who have been giving evidence to the Education Committee gave the impression that there had not been the effort, endeavour and commitment that the Minister suggests. Whom do I believe? Do I believe one deputation after another, or do I believe the Minister? It is pretty clear whom one would believe — all the deputations that come along and say with one voice that there has not been the engagement that there should have been.

If it were simply that the Minister had failed the test regarding post-primary transfer, that would be bad enough. However, when one looks at the Minister's record right across the education sector, one sees that it is a record of failure after failure after failure, and some of the decisions taken recently have shown that to be the case.

The Minister is also responsible for the Youth Service, which should be complementing our formal education system, yet what did she do? She de-prioritised the Youth Service in her budget, when everyone else right across the board put more money into their budgets. That will result in less money going into the Youth Service in the coming years.

Funding had been put into some of the more difficult interface areas in north Belfast and parts of west Belfast to deal with the needs of schools in those areas — schools that have particular problems because of the legacy of interface and other sectarian violence over a number of years. What did the Minister do? She took away the funding. Nevertheless, teachers and principals who attended the Committee put forward a clear argument and said with a coherent voice that that was the wrong decision.

We see how the Minister is handling the issue of the proposed education and skills authority. Right across the board, issue after issue, the Minister has demonstrated her incompetence. The post-primary transfer issue should be put to a subcommittee of the Executive. Moreover, the Minister should acknowledge her incompetence and her inability to do the job, and do the right thing. For the sake of the children, we should see not only the establishment of a subcommittee but the resignation of the Minister.

Mr Ross: Today's debate is necessary only because the Education Minister has, once again, failed in her role to introduce appropriate proposals for post-primary transfer. The only way to formulate a strategy in time is to establish a ministerial subcommittee — as my party called for previously in the Executive. The decision must be taken out of the Minister's hands. The two Bradleys said that if we went down that route, the Minister would then not be accountable for the decisions. This side of the House wants to see the issue resolved, and if the Minister is not willing to do that, we must set up a group that will.

I have spoken on this topic in the Chamber on many occasions, and I have listened to the Minister deny repeatedly that there is any panic or confusion among the public, parents or teachers. In that regard, she is less of a Vera Duckworth and more of a Lance Corporal Jones in that her rhetoric keeps referring to, "Don't panic, don't panic". I can assure the Minister that there is panic. Education is among the top three biggest issues

that concern the people of Northern Ireland, along with hospital cleanliness and crime.

As has been mentioned, the DUP has hosted several well-attended public meetings throughout Northern Ireland on the subject of post-primary education transfer. The one clear message that came out of all those meeting is that there is utter frustration with the way in which the Minister is behaving and utter confusion as to what is going on.

That is reflected in the action of the so-called breakaway grammar schools, including Lumen Christi College, which have decided that, in the absence of firm and acceptable proposals, they will formulate their own test. They are perfectly entitled to do so; as we know, academic selection is safeguarded in law.

3.00 pm

My party colleague Ms McIlveen, along with Mr Basil McCrea, mentioned the fact that the Minister's popularity was the subject of a poll carried out by 'The Irish News', which gave the Education Minister the poorest rating of all Ministers in the current Executive. The 'Belfast Telegraph' ran its own poll, which revealed that most people are still none the wiser as to how she plans to transfer children from primary to post-primary schools, and that most people disagree with her so-called vision of ending academic selection. Importantly, that MORI poll for the 'Belfast Telegraph' reports that 70% of adults in Northern Ireland agree with some type of academic selection, including 64% of Sinn Féin voters. It seems that even more people wish to retain academic selection now than was the case six years ago.

The supposedly leaked Sinn Féin education position paper actually acknowledges the fact that the Minister cannot abolish academic selection, and that her guidelines can be ignored. That is why it is imperative that she bring forward proposals that are acceptable to all sides of the House. Because she has not done so, my party felt it appropriate to come up with our own proposals, and put those to the public in a series of public meetings.

The Minister, and the very few supporters that she has left, make much of the notion of fairness, and of ensuring that children are not penalised because of their social background. Of course, as my colleague Mr Wilson mentioned earlier, evidence shows that the fairest way to do that is through a system of selection, using criteria based on merit alone.

If we move towards a system that uses geographical criteria, as advocated by the Minister, or that involves all-ability or comprehensive schools, the result would be that parents with the most money would move closest to the most popular schools. That is already happening in areas of Northern Ireland, just as it happened in England and Scotland. In fact, last Wednesday, I met the Archbishop of Dublin in this Building, and he confirmed

that it is also happening in Dublin, where parents with most money are moving closest to the best schools.

Grammar schools will never struggle to fill their places. It is the secondary schools that will suffer if the Minister does not react. Whatever proposals are made, we must ensure that those schools that are more vocational in nature do not suffer.

It is clear to all that the Education Minister is not listening to Members, to the teachers, or to the parents. She refuses to budge, despite the opposition to her stance, even in her own party, if the murmurings are to be believed. There is therefore no alternative but to establish a ministerial subgroup to examine the issue. Ultimately, the Executive will have the final say on the issue, but it would be beneficial, particularly in dealing with this controversial and important decision, if some type of subgroup could be established, such as was created to examine PPS 14 and the issue of water charges.

There are genuine differences in the House on how we should move forward, and that reflects the differing positions on both sides of the House. However, it is important that we recognise both the legal realities and the opinion of the vast majority of people in the Province, the majority of the Executive, of the Assembly, and of the Education Committee, and use that as a way through the impasse. The amendments tabled by Sinn Féin and the SDLP are not acceptable, because we have been waiting for months already, and have seen no movement from the Minister. I do not believe that people are willing to wait any longer.

As Mr Lunn conceded, the Alliance Party amendment denotes no timescale for the Minister to make her detailed proposals, and experience tells us that we have waited long enough. That amendment would, once again, allow the Minister off the hook. The original motion recognises that the Minister is refusing to move, and that the decision must now be taken out of her hands in order to see some progress.

Mr Kennedy: The Ulster Unionist Party proposed the motion without any desire to score cheap political points, nor with a desire to politically assassinate a Minister. The Ulster Unionist Party is not calling for the protection and promotion of some schools at the expense of other schools. We have been driven to this position by a growing and grave concern for the future of our education system, and, most specifically, concern about the immediate prospects for the post-primary transfer system.

An education system is the foundation stone of any society. A good education system is crucial to ensure our economic competitiveness and social cohesion. There is, however, mounting public concern in all communities in Northern Ireland that the Education Minister simply does not know what she is doing. The 11-plus ends this year, and in spite of being in office for

over a year, the Minister has come up with no proposals for what happens next.

Widespread — and sometimes, apparently, informed — speculation suggests that she will bring a proposal for a graduated end to academic selection to the Executive on Thursday. However, the detail of that proposal and its long-term implications must be studied very carefully before it is endorsed.

The Minister has left schools with ridiculously insufficient time to prepare parents and pupils. Instead, we have had to watch — and I emphasise “watch” — a Minister on a destructive solo mission, which has seen her ostracise the vast majority of education professionals, parents and elements in the media.

The Minister has fashioned the enviable position of creating cross-community consensus. The only problem for her is that people have united to question her competence. In newspaper opinion polls, letter pages, editorials, public meetings, radio shows and parent-teacher associations, the Minister's competence is being questioned.

There is no confidence in the Education Committee, the Assembly, or the Executive in the Minister's actions. It appears that her own party is being strongly whipped to support her, but that support has become less enthusiastic, more begrudging and, on occasions, mute.

While the Minister has carried out her ideological crusade, she has also presided over severe reductions in extended schools' funding that will see the disappearance of after-school and breakfast clubs, badly affecting the families and children who most need their services.

Equally, the Minister has overseen a budgetary allocation that widens the gap in funding between primary and secondary schools. Further testimony to her political failure is the fact that a Sinn Féin Minister now presides over a system of independent entrance tests. The Association for Quality Education made it clear that it did not want to go down that route. However, without dialogue and guidance its members felt that they had been forced into a corner.

That did not stop the Minister from using bullying tactics to attempt to batter them into submission. In Mafia-style language, the Minister said:

“They have a choice, people always have a choice. What I would say to them is think very carefully before you go down the route of bringing boards of governors into situations where they may find themselves spending their time in court.”

The Minister, as a tennis player, has been in more courts than Martina Navratilova. Her chilling words were not spared on Lumen Christi College either, when she said of its choice:

“The Board of Governors of Lumen Christi should be in no doubt the Department of Education will not fund, facilitate or in any way support a breakaway entrance exam.”

The Minister might be called Minister Ruane. She is, in effect, Minister of ruin. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak to Members about the important issue of post-primary transfer and the 11-plus. However, this is just one part of the shake-up that our education system needs to bring it into the twenty-first century. Since I became Education Minister on 8 May 2007, my priority has been to achieve a way forward and to make the education system work for all our children.

Ó rinneadh Aire Oideachais don Tuaisceart díom, bhuaill mé leis na páirtithe leasmhara uilig chun clár leasaithe ar an chóras oideachais a phlé, chomh maith le socruithe d'aistriú iarbhunoidachais in ionad an 11-plus.

I immediately set about meeting all stakeholders to discuss the wide range of education reform issues, including the question of replacing the 11-plus with new arrangements for post-primary transfer. The last 11-plus tests take place this year, and it is now difficult to find anyone who ever supported them.

Advancing that programme of reform requires strong leadership combined with a willingness to engage with people representing a wide range of views.

During the following six months, I initiated a process of policy review and development in all areas of education in which change is needed; and that development involved many more issues than the narrow issue of academic selection. The future of post-primary education is part of a holistic reconsideration of how that provision is organised, the curriculum it will deliver and the wider education system in which it operates. Underpinning all of that is the central issue of improving quality of learning and raising standards for all children.

Those issues have been taken forward through a new school-improvement policy called Every School a Good School, *Gach scoil ina scoil mhaith*, which will be implemented in September 2008. The Department will also do more to raise achievement levels, especially in literacy and numeracy. It wants to go far beyond measures of success in examinations by placing a high value on excellent pastoral care; on fostering a spirit of good citizenship, and on promoting in all pupils a strong desire for lifelong learning that will equip them for adulthood and make them confident, creative and articulate young people.

During the past 12 months, I have talked to hundreds of teachers, school principals, parents, children and people who are interested in education. I have engaged in extensive fact finding. I have carried out wide-ranging discussion and consultation on how to make progress. Some people have criticised me for not having instant

solutions to the challenges facing the education system. I have been in office for just one year. During that time, I have worked on several progressive proposals and initiatives to transform a 60-year-old education system into one that is fit for the twenty-first century.

Aithníom go bhfuil roinnt daoine go láidir i gcoinne na forbartha. Agus mé ag glacadh céime chun tosaigh, chaith mé cuid mhaith ama le teacht ar chomhdhearcaidh ar an chur chuige is fearr.

I acknowledge that there is deep resistance to change in some quarters. I have taken considerable time to try and build consensus on the way forward. Having listened to and learned from a wide range of views, I have prepared proposals that will command support from as many people as possible. Frankly, on such an issue, it would be impossible to produce proposals on which everyone could agree. However, with the future of children's education as my focus, I believe that my proposals represent the best way forward.

The main drivers of the changes are: the demographic trends that have led to there being 50,000 empty desks in classrooms — a figure that is set to rise; the obligation to deliver the entitlement framework with increased educational options for young people at age 14 and post-16 years of age; and the need to raise standards and tackle the long tail of underachievement — particularly in working-class communities. The system cannot stand still, and things cannot go on as they have in the past.

Delivering the range of initiatives and reforms, which include the entitlement framework; the Every School a Good School, *Gach scoil ina scoil mhaith*, policy; the new transfer arrangements, and area-based planning, are essential if we are to give every child the greatest range of education opportunities while tackling the serious problem in the education system of underachievement. They are also essential to how education will support long-term economic growth. It must also be recognised that to make a real impact on poverty and disadvantage, the education system must provide every child with access to quality education.

Members are aware that, particularly in the aftermath of the investment conference, more must be done to produce the talented individuals that the economy requires. That means extending academic excellence across all of the education system and not limiting it in any way, shape or form. The Every School a Good School, *Gach scoil ina scoil mhaith*, policy has been developed following discussions with teachers and young people about what they believe drives school improvement and characterises a good school.

3.15 pm

That has reached consultation stage, and I look forward to its outcome. I will take on board what teachers — the reflective practitioners — propose. The policy

will set out how we deliver improvement at every level of the education system. A targeted programme of school improvement will be rolled out to ensure that every school is a good school. Every school is capable of, and should actively strive for, improvement in teaching and learning. From talks that I have had with many teachers and school principals, I know that we have a workforce that is committed to, and capable of, delivering those improvements.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil na scileanna agus an tiomantas ag ceannairí le córas oideachais den scoth a sholáthar a fhreagraíonn do riachtanais gach dalta.

I know that school leaders have the necessary commitment and skills to deliver a high-quality education system that is responsive to the individual needs of every pupil. I want to see academic excellence across the entire education system. I do not want any child to be denied the right to an academic education, just as I want every child to be able to access the fullest range of educational pathways, including vocational excellence.

The revised curriculum was introduced here in September 2007. Its focus, in the early years, is on developing knowledge and skills at Key Stage 4 to ensure a greater range of educational opportunity and experience for young people.

At Key Stage 4, when children are aged 14, the introduction of the entitlement framework will ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their background or where they live, will have equal rights to choose from a wider range of courses and pathways. Pupils aged 14 will have the right to choose from 24 options, and pupils at post-16 level will have 27 options to choose from.

That process of policy development culminated in my speech to the Assembly on 4 December 2007 in which I set out my vision for education in the North, based on election at 14 and informed choice in an area-planned post-primary system that is designed to deliver the entitlement framework and meet the needs of young people.

At that point, I initiated a series of meetings with all the stakeholders, including: trade unions; the Association of Head Teachers of Secondary Schools; the children's rights sector; the Governing Bodies Association, the Transferers Representative Council; the Catholic Trustees; and the chief executives of the education and library boards. I sought written responses from those groups and from the Committee for Education by 11 January 2008. Following that, I arranged a further series of meetings in February and March with the stakeholders that are most central to the transfer process.

Ar 4 Márta, d'fhógair mé beart pleanála atá bunaithe sa cheantar le díriú ar an oideachas iarbhunscoile; beidh an beart seo á chur i bhfeidhm ag grúpaí pleanála atá bunaithe sa cheantar.

On 4 March 2008, I announced a post-primary-focused area-planning exercise, which has been implemented by area-based planning groups. The job of those groups will be to introduce proposals for the best design of post-primary provision in each area in order to deliver the full entitlement framework of 2013. Some schools will be able to deliver, on their own, the range of courses that are required under the entitlement framework. However, many others will need to collaborate with other schools, further education colleges and other providers.

On the specific issue of transfer policy, I have developed a wide-ranging package of proposals that take account of the fact that some schools will need time to adjust to the necessary changes in order to provide a high-quality education. That is what we are about.

The extensive consultation on the new transfer arrangements is now complete. I will present my proposals to the Executive on 15 May, which is in two days' time, and after that, I will engage with the Committee for Education.

It is my intention to prepare new admissions-criteria regulations for schools admissions for September 2010 and beyond. Replacing a 60-year-old system was never going to be easy, and there are no quick-fix solutions. My discussions with all sectors have been detailed and exhaustive. Throughout the process, I have engaged with people who represent all sides of the debate. I recognise that parents have fears about what will happen to their children. I rehearsed all those matters to make a simple point.

Since coming into office, I have conducted an inclusive and exhaustive process that is designed to deliver a resolution to the question of post-primary transfer and the wider imperatives for reform. That is the only responsible resolution to the issue of transfer, because it considers the issue as part of a bigger picture and through a consultative and inclusive approach. We cannot stay still; the world around us is constantly changing, and we must give all our children the greatest opportunities so that they can contribute positively to our community and to our society.

On 15 May, I will bring proposals to the Executive. Therefore, I see no need for a subcommittee to be involved in the issue. The issue has required, and still requires, leadership and resolve. I have provided both, and I will continue to do so. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Lunn: To my disappointment, the Minister did not answer my question, and she did not even refer to it. I asked whether the Minister could assure the House that the proposals would be brought before the Assembly for debate without accelerated passage or any subterfuge or attempts to bypass the Assembly. I am particularly disappointed that she did not mention that.

The Minister said that the proposal will come before the Executive in the next couple of days and that it would subsequently come to the Committee for Education. However, she did not say when it would come to the Committee, and I am concerned by that. Without meaning any disrespect, I heard the Minister make the same speech a few months ago.

Mr Storey: That is a trait of the Education Minister: she regurgitates the same mantras that we have heard over the past few weeks. She talked about consultation. Does the Member accept that, on 4 March 2008, the Minister made a great play about area planning, and wrote to the chief executives of the education and library boards four weeks later, on 2 April? The Education Committee is still waiting for the terms of reference for her plans on area-based planning. The Minister wants to provide only the information that she wants us to have, and when she wants to provide it. We have no confidence in the Minister, and the best thing that she can do is resign.

Mr Lunn: That was some intervention; I will not comment on it.

The motion calls on the Executive to create a ministerial subcommittee, and perhaps one will be created. Basil McCrea and Sammy Wilson said — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Comments are flying from one side of the House to the other, and I cannot hear Mr Lunn's speech. Members on one side of the House are making comments; they could not have known what the Minister said because they were holding their own conversations. I call for order in the House.

Mr Lunn: The motion calls on the Executive to create a subcommittee. Basil McCrea and Sammy Wilson made that proposal sound as though it was intended as a helping hand to the Minister. I contrast that with the demands from Michelle McIlveen, Nelson McCausland, Mervyn Storey and others that the Minister resign. Alastair Ross put his finger on the matter when he said that he wanted to take the decision out of the Minister's hands. One cannot have it both ways — that is not going to happen.

Much mention was made of polls and radio phone-ins, such as the 'The Stephen Nolan Show' —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No. I have fallen foul of the rule on interventions before.

Such polls can prove anything. A couple of years ago, a poll showed that 84% of people wanted their children to be educated in the integrated system. I was heartened by that poll, but I did not believe it. Michelle McIlveen mentioned a poll that was taken of primary school principals. In the past year, I have not spoken to a primary school principal who wants to retain academic

selection. In common with the Minister, I can find hardly anyone who wants to retain it.

Although I do not go to DUP public meetings, everyone that I speak to —

A Member: Perhaps the Member should.

Mr Lunn: Maybe I should, but then nobody would be at ours. Frankly, one gets the reaction that one would expect from such people.

The people who take the trouble to talk to me, particularly the parents of P5 children, are frustrated and concerned, and we all know that. However, in two days' time, hopefully, the process will restart. Talk about a ministerial subcommittee will not advance that process, except as a means of having the debate that we have had several times before — it was not just the Minister's speech that sounded familiar; many of the other contributions did as well.

A Member: Including your own.

Mr Lunn: If you like.

I was concerned when Dominic Bradley said that the papers have already been informed. Danny Kennedy mentioned — I have done some harm to Mr McNarry. *[Laughter.]*

Danny Kennedy said that he had heard a leak about a graduated end to selection. I am concerned about leaks. The process is going on in a vacuum, and, in a vacuum, one gets leaks.

Like everybody else, I encourage the Minister to come clean to the Assembly about her proposals, and that is the thrust of the Alliance Party's amendment. Even at this late stage and although our amendment does not stipulate a time limit, I hope that the other parties might accept it because it is realistic.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mr McCrea began the debate by speaking, as I did, about the Minister's delay in providing information, and I will address that in more detail later. He also quoted two surveys: one in 'The Irish News', in which 93.3% of school principals declared that they had insufficient information, and the other in the 'Belfast Telegraph', stating that 62% of parents do not understand the Minister's plans. Mr McCrea said that that has led to the Minister's competence being questioned far and wide and that the public perceive the Minister to be failing. He also predicted that, during the Minister's watch, she would preside over unregulated academic selection. Mr McCrea suggested that the mechanism of an Executive subcommittee would ensure that the Minister fulfilled her wider obligations and bolster public confidence. I share Mr McCrea's concern, but I disagree with his proposed solution.

On Sinn Féin's behalf, Michelle O'Neill argued that the motion is already outdated because the Minister

intends to present a paper to the Executive on Thursday — assuming that it is not in this evening's 'Belfast Telegraph'. However, she could not say what is in that paper. She claimed that, by proposing the formation of an Executive subcommittee, the UUP wishes to bypass the democratic process and, thus, take power from the Minister. However, the Minister's colleague Conor Murphy had no such hesitation about giving his power to an Executive subcommittee in order to avoid a watery grave.

Trevor Lunn largely agreed with me about the need to hold the Minister to account and to ensure that she faces up to her responsibilities. I encourage him to go one step further and support my amendment.

As I said, the dearth of information is clear to the public. We have no policy detail about area-based planning or sustainable schools. We still do not know what the areas will be, how they will be defined and how boundaries will be established. In the post-selection era, education providers will have to live in a vastly changed education landscape. They will have to decide how education is to be delivered in their sector through existing schools and in collaboration with schools from other sectors. How can they make such decisions without knowing the areas in which they will work?

Naturally, various sectors will bring their interests to the area-planning table. Those interests will need to be reconciled with the overall vision for each area. What is the Minister's advice on how to best achieve that? How will area-based planning operate in the context of open enrolment? The two concepts do not sit easily side by side — one could argue that they are mutually exclusive. Will open enrolment be ended? If so, how will that impact on parental choice in certain areas? On what basis will area boundaries be established? Those are all legitimate questions that must be answered. However, the answers have not been forthcoming.

3.30 pm

The consultation on sustainable schools closed at Easter 2007, and the Minister has yet to announce her response. That policy is closely connected to the other reforms that are under discussion to address falling rolls and the effective use of funding. Area-based planning could have a significant effect on the sustainability of schools, but it will be impossible to reorganise education on an area basis without a guiding policy. More than a year after the consultation on sustainable schools ended, we have not had sight of a policy.

The motion would accommodate the lack of accountability that already exists and allow the Minister to shirk her responsibilities again. We are not here to let the Minister off the hook; we are here to hold her to account. On that basis, I ask members to support amendment No 2. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Basil McCrea began the debate by telling the House what the debate was not about. However, in telling us what the debate was about, he outlined the same issues that he said the debate was not about. I know that I am in the presence of greatness and that Mr McCrea has recently received an award, but even I did not understand the context in which he was placing the debate.

The origins of the motion lie in a television debate during which Basil McCrea was challenged by the presenter to outline his proposals for post-primary transfer. He studied for a while and said that his party would pursue proposals. However, the motion does not constitute pursuing proposals — it is a waste of debating time and a waste of the Assembly's time. The process has moved on from meaningless debates. The Minister will outline her proposals to the Executive on Thursday, which will be crystal clear in detailing the way forward. All the parties who have Ministers in the Executive will have sight of those proposals on Thursday.

In his contribution, Mr Basil McCrea seemed to speak on behalf of "everybody". He claimed that everybody knows that the Minister does not know what she is doing, and that nobody knows what is happening. However, everybody does not agree with John O'Dowd. Members should not make such broad-based statements in the Chamber.

There is a perception among the parties on the Benches opposite that the eradication of academic selection is a plot that has been dreamed up by Sinn Féin. However, for decades, teachers' unions, educationalists and other interested organisations have said that academic selection — particularly the 11-plus — is detrimental to the education of children. The list of people that are opposed to academic selection includes: the Association of Head Teachers; teachers' trade unions; the vast majority of educationalists; the Catholic Church; some grammar schools, which have indicated that they are leaving the system; and, although one could not tell from its Members' speeches, the SDLP. Therefore, ending academic selection is not simply a Sinn Féin plot — there is a large and growing body of opinion that we must move away from academic selection.

Although the education system in England is not the same as ours, the front page of 'The Daily Telegraph' carries the story that a Select Committee at Westminster, which some Members may hold in high regard, has stated that academic selection damages the education of children.

It is not simply a Sinn Féin plot.

Mr S Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I have only a limited amount of time, Sammy.

The comments of the Alliance Party are fair enough — I do not agree with them all, but at least the Alliance Party is allowing the Minister to present the proposals and is allowing them to be debated in a rational manner. That is the way forward.

Sammy Wilson — who was not speaking as the Chairperson of the Education Committee — made an informed contribution to the debate. Other Members were not so informed. As for Miss McIlveen's contribution, if an argument has to resort to personal insults, there is no substance to it. I could trade personal insults with Miss McIlveen — she is a good subject to work on. However, I will not, because that would be immature.

Mervyn Storey questioned the Sinn Féin reshuffle. I will let Members into a secret: I was offered the opportunity to spend every Friday morning with Sammy Wilson, Mervyn Storey and Michelle McIlveen, and I jumped at the chance. How could I resist that?

The debate will progress on Thursday. Members have a responsibility to approach the debate and the proposals on post-primary education in a responsible and mature manner. Educationalists, parents and children are fed up of listening to the political battle that has been raging on. It is time to start debating education. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr B McCrea: Perhaps unusually for me, I have sat quietly and listened to the debate. I am somewhat disappointed by some of the comments that were made by Members who feel that people are not moving on. The reason why I spoke in the manner that I did — and the reason why Sammy Wilson spoke in the manner that he did — is because we are actively looking for a solution. Tub-thumping does no good. I can make those types of speeches, and I am happy to take interventions and to stand my corner, but that is not helpful. I agree with Sammy Wilson, 100%.

People are looking to the Assembly to find solutions. If a solution on education is not found that is satisfactory to the majority of people in Northern Ireland, this Assembly, this Executive, and this body politic will fail and will fall. The situation is that serious. It is easy to say that the debate is just a bit of pat-a-cake, and that we can have a little joke, but education is important for the future of Northern Ireland and its people.

Today, I have endured jibes from the DUP, disappointment from the SDLP, ridicule from Sinn Féin and a complete list of misdemeanours from the Alliance Party. I must be doing something right because there seems to be a consensus on my comments from those parties. What really disappoints me is that words are being twisted. In trying to reach accommodation, one can be accused of having a change of mind. The UUP has not changed its mind. We are trying to reach an accommodation.

It is not fair to say that people argued for the 11-plus. No one, including the Minister, has been able to come

up with a viable alternative. The UUP is seeking a fair, inclusive and rational alternative. That cannot be done in six months. The Minister talked of criticism of her for not having instant solutions, because she has been in the job for only one year. We are not doing that. We are saying that she should not have removed a working system until she had some idea of what was going to replace it. That has led to the panic and the disappointment that people are experiencing.

By all means, she should introduce proposals and ideas about which she wants to talk to the Assembly, but she must not throw the baby out with the bath water — she must first put some sort of solution in place.

John O'Dowd mentioned all the people who opposed academic selection — the unions and so on and so forth. It must have come as a shock to him to discover that a poll showed that only 8% of people of Northern Ireland think that the Minister is doing a good job. It must come as a surprise when he talks to people who ask if there is any information on developments. The issue is not whether we are moving in the right direction. The issue is that there is no way forward and there are no plans — that is what is unacceptable.

We come then to the twisting of words. The Minister of Education says that she knows that there are people against change. However, change for the sake of change is not the right way forward. Her party has been in existence for over 100 years. That seems far too long to me. It is about time that its members stopped going on about a united Ireland or whatever other principles it believes in. That is the logic that the Minister tries to apply to our position. I see that my remarks have caused some mirth. However, contrary to the argument that the Minister tries to make to us, the sophisticated argument that we try to put across concerns points of principle. Just because something has been working for some time does not mean that it is wrong. People are entitled to their views, and if there are efforts to build some form of consensus, then we must have something to talk about.

We are told that there will be an announcement in two days' time; however, what happens when the Minister presents her proposals? That is the big question. I put that question to Mr Lunn or Mr Bradley. On the off chance that Sinn Féin is not correct and that it does not sweep all in front of it, then what? Just say those Members disagree with the proposals, will they and other Members have a chance to debate them or express their views? Mary Bradley talked about inclusion. The Education Committee has not been included in anything. Its members have had no sight of the proposals and are not engaged in the process. It is therefore hardly surprising that we cannot tell people outside what the way forward is.

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: As long as he does not take as long as other Members have done.

Mr Lunn: I would never do that. Does the Member not agree that the thrust of the Alliance Party's amendment is that there should be time for full debate on the proposals, both at Committee and in the Assembly?

Mr B McCrea: I take Mr Lunn's point. I understand the purpose of the amendment; however, I cannot support it, because we do not have time for full consideration of the proposals. We do not have the time to bring legislation through. We have wasted a year. Had we wanted to go down that route, we should have done so earlier.

I am not a great supporter of Executive subcommittees and so on, but I see no other forum through which the Assembly can thrash out a solution to this problem — and a solution is badly needed. If someone else can come up with some other approach, or if we can have a grand debate in the Chamber and sort this matter out in one day, fair enough. However, all that will happen is that people will restate their positions. I, too, have heard all the speeches. Through this debate, I tried to introduce something different. The people of Northern Ireland will not forgive us if we cannot find some kind of solution.

Mr O'Dowd says that this motion is a continuation of a television debate. To be frank, a television studio is about the only place that we can have any debate. It has come as some relief that the Member is now the party's education spokesman because, for quite a long time, I thought that the Minister of Education was not talking to me personally. I do not know how to engage: I do not have the opportunity to talk about the issues, even though I have plenty of ideas that I want to put forward.

Sinn Féin says that those in favour of academic selection do not represent the vast majority of people, but that cannot be so — the DUP is the largest party in the House, and the UUP is the third largest party, so together we represent a large number of people. Moreover, I will even say to Members on this side of the House that a significant number of people from the Roman Catholic tradition share our concerns about academic criteria. We are not being prescriptive about how this matter should progress. To fly in the face of what the people want is absolutely undemocratic, and it ill behoves any of us here to support such a solution.

3.45 pm

Some said that we were a little too late in bringing this motion to the Chamber. Frankly, we did the best we could: we submitted the motion and waited for it to be called. Suddenly — miraculously — the subject is now on the Executive's agenda. Pulling a rabbit out of a hat is no way to run a country — that is kindergarten stuff. We need mature dialogue, reflection and debate,

and to seek compromise, because not everything proposed is wrong. As things now appear, if this matter is not resolved before the summer, there will be a war of attrition. I hope that in the Minister's proposals will be a better way of sorting out the next few years than having schools doing their own thing, because there are dangers in that. I hope, too, that the Minister will not cap the finances of those schools that do not go along with her way of thinking, because any such proposal amounts to bullying and would be unacceptable in a civilised country.

Surely there is a better way. Surely the Minister recognises, when she looks at the opinion polls and listens to Members' speeches, that there is some small value in what we have to say.

Mr McNarry: What will be the Member's impressions if the Minister, in making this challenge to us, fails to win Executive support for her proposals?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, the Member's time is up. Your intervention was very badly timed, Mr McNarry. *[Laughter.]*

Before I put the question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that if this, or any subsequent amendment, is made, all other amendments will fall, and I will proceed to put the question on the motion as amended.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 3 be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly, given high levels of public concern, calls on the Executive to create a Ministerial Sub-Committee to recommend appropriate regulations to govern post-primary transfer from 2010.

Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes to do so.

A valid petition of concern was presented on Tuesday 6 May 2008 in relation to the motion. The effect of the petition is that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to abandon proposals to establish primary and post-primary Irish-medium schools in Dungannon and the wider South Tyrone area where there are already a considerable number of long-term unfilled places; and expresses its concern at the detrimental impact the creation of such schools would have on both present and future education budgets.

Before I get into the meat of the motion, it has been brought to our attention that a petition of concern has been signed by more than 30 Members. That is quite significant, and it tells us something about those Members who are opposed to the motion. They know that they cannot win the debate by the force of argument, so they reached for the most blunt instrument in the box — a petition of concern.

The other significant factor is that the SDLP feels compelled to be greener than the shinnars on this issue, and my constituency colleague Tommy Gallagher finds himself compelled to lead the charge. In an article in yesterday's 'Irish News', Mr Gallagher talked balderdash and failed to address any of the issues. Instead, he opted for a sectarian rant, and that is to be deplored. I am sure that when he reads that article, he will hang his head in shame.

Mr Gallagher comes from a rural constituency, and he is a former teacher. Therefore, I fail to understand why he wants to pour millions of pounds into an Irish language school when many rural schools in his constituency are being closed down by the Minister. When the Member and his party reflect on that issue, they will have many regrets.

I wish to bring some important points to the attention of the House, and I look forward to hearing other Members' opinions on the issue.

Mr Gallagher: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify what issue is under debate? So far, I have only heard the proposer of the motion launching a bitter, personal attack on me.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order.

Lord Morrow: If Mr Gallagher holds on tight, he will hear all right. I am surprised that he had any difficulty

in hearing me — I thought that I was quite clear. Nevertheless, I will speak louder, if that is the problem.

The Minister stated in a document that was published by her Department that some families in the Dungannon area have opted for Irish-medium education. She went on to say that there will be 17 pupils on the roll in September 2008. By my calculations, that means that there are three or four families who are interested in educating their children in an Irish-speaking school.

I see that the Minister is not in her place, which is a further example that she is not going to pay much attention to what anyone has to say. Nevertheless, I will pose the question: if three or four families get together on any educational issue, will special terms be set aside for them? It is a disgrace that the Minister is going to strip millions of pounds from her budget to pour into an Irish-medium school. There is an equality issue, which must be tested in another place, at another time. We will observe the situation carefully.

The Minister does not often answer questions that are put to her. She fumbles about, but she seldom, if ever, answers any questions that are put to her. My colleague Sammy Wilson asked her questions about the enrolment in that school in Dungannon. In her reply, she said that she could not estimate the number of children who would be attending that school. In a document that her Department produced on 7 May 2008, she stated that the review of Irish-medium education will not be completed until the end of May 2008.

However, she proceeds to open schools without demonstrating forward thinking or giving any thought to planning or strategy.

Mr S Wilson: Does the Member agree that the situation is even worse than he states? Many new Irish-medium schools employ people who are not qualified teachers. School inspectors' results reflect that fact and highlight the quality of education being offered to youngsters.

Lord Morrow: My colleague Mr Wilson makes a succinct point. I am sure that the Minister is listening but paying little attention — that is sad. It strikes me and my colleagues on this side of the House that the Minister does not take her responsibilities seriously. If I were a member of Sinn Féin, I would ask how much longer we can tolerate Caitríona — given the position that she is in, she has outlived her usefulness. Mr O'Dowd has become the party's education spokesperson, so he may be the Minister-in-waiting. To be fair to him, he could not do a worse job — no matter how hard he tried — than Caitríona Ruane.

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree that the Minister has become so much of a lame duck that she would be wise to avoid walking past Jim Shannon's house? *[Laughter.]*

Lord Morrow: Yes. Mr Weir's point is that Mr Shannon is an avid shooter, noted for shooting doves.

I suspect that Mr Gallagher will speak during the debate, because he is a former teacher from a rural constituency — the same constituency as me and my colleague Arlene Foster.

During the debate on post-primary transfer, the Minister said that 50,000 desks sit empty in schools across Northern Ireland. Within 10 years, that figure will have increased by 30,000, at which stage the number of empty desks will verge on 100,000. Despite that, the Minister feels compelled to pour millions of pounds into opening an Irish-medium school in Dungannon, even though she cannot yet guarantee the enrolment of 17 pupils.

Does anyone believe the opening of such schools to be anything other than blatant squandering of public funds? I suspect that the Minister will be pleased to open those schools to satisfy her naked sectarian agenda. She thinks that she is the Minister for Sinn Féin — she must realise that she is the Minister of Education. She is responsible for all Northern Ireland's population, not only a dozen or so people dotted across the country. She has a responsibility to provide an equitable education system for all the children of Northern Ireland. However, she is failing miserably in that duty.

It is time that the Minister caught herself on — before others catch her on. Her party colleagues should already be telling her to respond to the needs and demands of children, parents and teachers. They are the real stakeholders in Northern Ireland, who want the establishment of a proper education system rather than the education system that the Minister offers. She must heed Members' views. She may win today's debate on the strength of tabling a petition of concern, through which she trapped the SDLP into following her sectarian agenda. Regrettably, the SDLP wants to demonstrate that it is as green as Sinn Féin. It is not necessary to demonstrate that; we were all aware of that fact before the debate, and, therefore, the SDLP has missed the boat completely. Tommy Gallagher has wasted his time and will, undoubtedly, waste his breath when he attempts to convince the House to the contrary.

I see that my time to speak is slipping away, so I will finish by saying to the Minister that she should devote her time to developing a quality education system in Northern Ireland that will stand the test of time — an education system of which she should be proud. Sadly, she is not interested in that. I see that my time is now up.

4.00 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I oppose the motion. The Irish language — the native language of this country — has been used as a spoken language for nearly 2,000 years, and it is an

important part of people's cultural identity and roots. However, as I have said before in the House, it does not belong to any one section of the community; it belongs to everyone, and we should take ownership of it and promote it as part of our shared heritage.

The promotion of the Irish language is an integral part of life in Dungannon and in the rest of south Tyrone. Gaelscoil Uí Néill is a very successful primary school in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council area, and it is an excellent example of the advantages that Irish-medium education can bring to a child's development. I have spoken to many parents in Dungannon who are keen to have their children educated through the medium of Irish, but who are unable to do so because of the lack of provision.

It is for that reason that I oppose the motion in the strongest terms. It is a blatant attempt to discriminate in the guise of concern about the number of unfilled school places, which has no relevance to this argument. Irish-medium education will not rely on an increase in the number of school-age children, but will fill a gap for those children who wish to be educated through Irish.

For several reasons, not least the commitment that was given in the Good Friday Agreement, but also on the basis of equality, there is an onus on the Minister of Education to provide facilities and support for those who wish to be taught through Irish. I only wish that the unionist politicians in the Chamber would understand that this is not about giving more to one education sector. The Irish-medium sector was neglected and ignored under direct rule. Yet, despite that, dedicated Gaels have worked tirelessly and without any financial support from the Department of Education to provide Irish-medium education for those who wish to avail themselves of it.

The demand for Irish-medium education is increasing. It is the fastest-growing education sector in the North, despite the overall reduction in the school-age population. The Irish-medium education sector is in a healthy state. We should welcome that fact and not punish those who are involved. We should also respect the rights of parents to choose to have their kids educated in the Irish-medium sector, the rights of teachers to teach in the sector, and the rights of children to be educated in the sector.

There is an onus on Mrs Foster and Mr Morrow to represent all their constituents to the best of their ability and to be honest with those constituents. Mrs Foster and Mr Morrow signed up to the Programme for Government; in case they are in any doubt, let me draw their attention to objective 4 of public service agreement (PSA) 10, 'Helping Our Children and Young People to Achieve Through Education', which is:

"To maximise high quality Irish-medium provision for those children whose parents wish it."

I would be grateful if the proposers of the motion would tell me what research they have done in Dungannon and the greater south Tyrone area to gauge support for, or opposition to, the establishment of Irish-medium education. If they have carried out research, what are the results, and was it carried out on a cross-community basis?

Minister Foster has a large portfolio, which includes the Planning Service. That agency has a serious backlog, and if we are to secure much-needed investment on the back of the recent economic conference, I am sure that the resulting planning applications from business will cause the Planning Service's backlog to grow. Would the Minister's efforts not be better placed in addressing —

Mrs Foster: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member is, of course, aware that I support the motion as a constituency representative and not as the Minister of the Environment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Point taken.

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the Minister of Education will examine the feasibility of the proposal to establish a grant-aided Irish-medium primary school in Dungannon from 1 September, and I am sure that she will treat the proposal as she would any other, by applying the relevant criteria without prejudice. When the consultation is completed and the Minister's recommendations are made known, I hope that we will accept them, as a result of due process, for the benefit of the education of children in the Dungannon area.

Mr Elliott: I support the motion, and I have concerns about Sinn Féin's view.

Given that pupil numbers are declining in Northern Ireland and that there are increasingly large numbers of vacant places in our schools, it seems strange that the Minister is opening new schools that will solely facilitate the Irish-medium sector. Those schools will have small numbers of pupils in comparison with mainstream schools.

The October 2006 Northern Ireland schools census highlights an estimated 36,000 surplus places in the primary sector and 18,500 spare places in the post-primary sector. Taking those figures into account, the desire to open more small schools that cater for a minority seems illogical. There are other ways for children and young people —

Mr Brolly: I thank the Member for giving way. It is important to point out that it is not necessary to build new schools in order to facilitate Irish-medium education. In my hometown, Dungiven, the Irish-medium stream is part of the main primary school, and that process is ongoing. We do not necessarily need new buildings.

Mr Elliott: I wonder whether Mr Brolly is clarifying the position in south Tyrone, in Dungannon and in

other areas, such as County Fermanagh, where Irish-medium pupils may be facilitated in the Catholic-maintained sector, because it is my understanding that new schools are being built. There are other cost-effective ways of facilitating Irish-medium education, as Mr Brolly said, but I do not believe that the Department is taking that route.

I am also concerned that, in the past, someone from an Irish republican background said that every word spoken in Irish was like a bullet to the heart of unionism. Sinn Féin has used the Irish language as a political weapon. If Sinn Féin were to stop using the language as a political weapon, it might be more widely supported throughout the community. The Irish language might receive support that is much more practical and cost-effective, instead of Sinn Féin's single-minded approach.

There are two types of Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland; there are 21 stand-alone schools, and there are 12 Irish-medium units that are attached to English-medium host schools. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the most cost-effective and best way for children to gain an education through the medium of Irish is for schools in the maintained sector to open Irish-medium units, if they so wish.

Recently, the Minister of Education has overseen severe cuts in the extended-schools funding, which will mean the closure of after-school and breakfast clubs right across all school sectors. That will affect children's abilities to achieve at school, and it may affect families' earning potential, as parents will have to look after their children for longer periods. The education system should be focusing on developing mainstream schools and ensuring that the best possible education is given to those who need it most.

In focusing on independent Irish-medium schools, the Minister will be in danger of, again, taking her eye off the ball simply in an attempt to appease some misplaced, ideological party goal. In the past seven years, £47 million has been spent on Irish-medium education, but that £47 million could have been spent much more productively elsewhere in education. We can speculate on how much money could have been saved had independent Irish-medium units simply been attached to existing schools.

We must also ask whether, if potentially only 12 children in Dungannon want an independent Irish-medium primary school, they have the right to take potential funding away from other education sectors. Their education could be facilitated in mainstream schools. That is the crux of the matter. Will such schools take significant finances away from other sections of the education system in the Province and actually discriminate against mainstream sectors?

Mr Gallagher: I will not waste time responding to Lord Morrow's personal attack on me, but I wish to

state, at the outset, that I submitted and signed the petition of concern because I happen to believe in the basic principles of fairness and common justice that Lord Morrow would like to sidestep in the debate.

An increasing number of parents are choosing to send their children to Irish-medium schools, just as there are parents who are choosing the integrated sector. That choice was recognised last year in the Bain Report. In relation to that trend, the report pointed out the Department's legal obligation to cater for both forms of parental choice. The Department's policy promotes respect for diversity, encourages the accommodation of different cultural traditions, and recognises the role that all schools, including Irish-medium schools, play in achieving those objectives.

The motion, in the name of the DUP, seeks to have Irish-medium schools treated differently and, therefore, fails to recognize the inalienable right that supporters of the Irish-medium sector have, to foster, develop and preserve our unique language.

An Ghaeilge is the indigenous language of the island and is a key element of cultural identity for many people who live in Northern Ireland. Irish-medium schools play a central role in promoting the language and should be treated in the same way as schools in all other sectors: maintained, controlled, integrated, or for those who choose, should there be a proven demand in the future, Ulster Scots. Parity of esteem between the main identities was a central part of the Good Friday Agreement and placed a statutory duty on the Department to promote Irish-medium education in line with integrated education.

The motion, in the name of the DUP representatives for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the constituency that I also represent, is about the Irish-medium sector in that constituency. It makes no reference to the new Clogher Valley Integrated Primary School, which is presently in temporary accommodation. It is because the SDLP believes that the same support and rights should be available to both sectors that I have tabled a petition of concern.

Given the falling pupil numbers that have been mentioned, and the threat to the future of so many schools, in order to respond to the valid concerns of parents, teachers and children, we should, as elected representatives, be working together rather than working against each other.

The Bain Report, which I referred to earlier, dealt to some extent with the growing problems of the drop in school enrolments. Although I do not agree with all the recommendations, the report did highlight that problem and the importance of education providers, across the spectrum, making efficient use of resources. I think that we all want to see that being done.

Options for consideration by the Irish-medium sector, as set out in the Bain Report, include new builds and the adaptation of existing school buildings. The report even mentions, as another option, the housing of those facilities within the controlled sector, and similar options were suggested for the integrated sector.

The final say on options — and I am sure few people would disagree — should be left to the appropriate authorities; in the case of integrated education to NICIE, and in the case of Irish Medium schools to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Falling pupil numbers have crystallised for governors, parents and teachers the need for new thinking on possibilities for collaboration and co-operation among all sectors. In their endeavours, they deserve the support of all elected representatives in the planning of future education provision in new ways. There is too much at stake for the future of all our schools, and Members should not be engaging in divisive debates.

4.15 pm

Mr Lunn: The motion raises an important issue and although it refers specifically to Dungannon and the wider south Tyrone area, the same argument could be directed to other areas in Northern Ireland. The sustainable schools policy is one of the fundamental issues on which we would like to hear the Minister's views. The Alliance Party seeks an assurance from the Minister that, ideally, all schools will be treated equally and fairly, and that no preference will be given to any particular sector. If we receive that assurance, we will probably oppose the motion.

The issue is not solely about the education budget; it is about the quality of education to be delivered within that budget. Irish-medium education enjoys parental demand and has a fine record. If the opposition is genuinely based on budget concerns, why does the motion refer only to one sector? In an interview on Sunday 11 May, Gregory Campbell called for parity with Irish for the Ulster-Scots movement; presumably, he meant parity with regard to investment. That may or may not be a good idea. I have no problem with either movement. However, it would have a detrimental effect on the education budget, to use the terms of the motion. Why, therefore, is the DUP so keen on parity?

There is no disputing that — as has already been discussed at great length in another debate today — we need to know more details about the ministerial proposals. The case could also undoubtedly be made that the Minister appears to have a double standard regarding Irish-medium education. She seems to grant significantly greater leeway to Irish-medium schools than to those in the integrated sector. If she is committed to the policy outlined in 'Every School a Good School', she should be careful not to play sectors off against one another; rather, she should treat all sectors equally.

The real irony is the position of the party that proposed the motion. The DUP was part of the Executive that produced the Programme for Government that, effectively, gave a blank cheque for the provision of Irish-medium education. If the DUP is so concerned about the budgetary implications of Irish-medium education provision, why did it not raise those concerns at the Executive table, when the Programme for Government and the Budget were being prepared? It did not raise those worries because a deal was done with Sinn Féin at that time.

Mrs Foster: The Member may have some difficulty in understanding the Programme for Government and the PSA targets therein. Will he accept that PSA 10, objective 4, of the Programme for Government — referred to by Michelle O'Neill — could reflect Irish-medium units and not necessarily Irish-medium schools?

Mr Lunn: I seem to have missed the point of that intervention. I will let the Member have another go if she wants.

Mrs Foster: I will have another go. This motion is about an Irish-medium school — a new building, an opening. That is what we are against. The PSA targets can deal with units in existing schools.

A Member: Has the Member got it now?

Mr Lunn: I have got it, but I will not respond.

The point that I was making is that this is a good example of the deals that were done between the two parties to get the Programme for Government through. Therefore, there is no use crying about it now.

We are supporters of the Irish language — and, probably, of the Ulster-Scots movement — but also of a realistic, responsible sustainable schools policy. If the Minister can give us assurances on the latter, we will oppose the motion; failing that, we will probably abstain.

Mr I McCrea: I congratulate my party colleagues Lord Morrow and Arlene Foster for proposing this motion. I do not understand some of the comments made by the Member who has just spoken. If a deal had been done between Sinn Féin and the DUP, why would the DUP bring forward a motion opposing it? That does not even come close to common sense.

The motion calls on the Minister of Education to abandon proposals to establish Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools in Dungannon and the wider south Tyrone area. As the proposed post-primary college is to be based in Cookstown in my constituency; I feel that I must raise my concerns about this blatant attempt to sectarianise our education system.

I do not object to anyone who wants to speak this foreign Irish language. However, I do object to proposals to fund Irish-medium schools in Northern

Ireland, especially when there are also proposals to close schools, many of which are in rural areas.

Together with other elected representatives, I am due to meet with the Minister regarding the proposed closure of Maghera High School, which has around 150 pupils: yet, the opening of another school for the Irish-medium sector with fewer pupils is being considered. That is a total disgrace, and I hope that the Minister will accept the need for Maghera High School to remain open to meet the needs of the local community. If the same time and money were spent on bolstering our education system as is being spent on the Irish-medium sector, there would be no need for that sector to exist, because those maintained schools that chose to teach Irish would be able to satisfy that need.

Much has been said about the need for Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland, but — unless I have missed something — we live in a country in which the mother tongue is the Queen's English. Moreover, it is also the main spoken language in the Irish Republic: Irish is spoken in everyday conversation only in small parts of the west coast of that country.

To whom will the pupils of Irish-medium schools speak? There is no town or village in the whole of Northern Ireland in which the people speak Irish as their first language. The Irish language is a minority language. I have no problem with people learning or speaking it, but I do have one with its politicisation, which is what is happening in the debate. Irish-language schools should not be prioritised in the way that they have been. Only a very small number of young people want to learn Irish, because it offers them no benefit.

As a young person, I had no choice but to learn GCSE French. I had no desire to do so because I felt that it would not benefit me. However, I accept that there is a distinct difference between a language that is understood by many people across the world and one that is understood by only a small number of people in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Unless I am mistaken, the money spent on teaching me the little French that I learnt was better spent than the expenditure proposed on the Irish-medium sector.

Not many people who learn Irish at school go on to use it in daily life. Patsy McGlone my constituency colleague is a fluent Irish speaker — at least I think he is, because I do not understand him when he speaks Irish. I respect his right to speak Irish, but I am sure that he will agree that it is not his everyday language. It is evident that many Sinn Féin Members stutter and stammer when they try to speak in Irish. That demonstrates that their interest in the language is purely political, and for that reason, their speaking it is offensive to many in the unionist tradition.

Irish-medium schools are nothing more than a drain on public money, which must not be allowed to continue. I therefore support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Merci beaucoup.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The debate has been most interesting. Ian McCrea has just spoken about how the Irish language is being politicised — that is so, but it is being politicised by the DUP. It is regrettable that the motion has been tabled, for it is discriminatory. It is especially regrettable that a ministerial colleague has put her name to that motion. It is incumbent upon me, as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, to represent all the people of my constituency. It is hugely regrettable that an elected representative should consider that she can exclude the Irish-medium education sector from her duty to represent.

I also wish to express an interest. I am a parent of a child who attended the naiscoil in Dungannon. My child was not able to progress to rang a haon because there was no Irish language provision in the town. I wanted my child to attend an Irish-medium educational establishment. It is hugely enriching for children to learn in Irish; it gives them an opportunity to have different ways of looking at the world and it broadens their horizons. A child who is taught bilingually has a much richer educational experience than one taught monolingually. That is also true of children who are taught through the medium of Irish.

Therefore, it was of great regret to me that my child was not able to go through Irish-medium education. I feel that, as a parent, my choice was not able to be fulfilled. I feel quite emotional about the issue of the Irish language and about the development of the Irish-medium sector in my constituency and across the island of Ireland.

We have been very lucky to have been set some very good examples. Michelle O'Neill talked about Gaelscoil Uí Néill, with which I am familiar. There is a new Irish-medium school in Lisnaskea, which is also doing extremely well. It is regrettable that this motion has been tabled at this time and in such a discriminatory way.

As I have already mentioned, Coalisland has the closest Irish-medium provision for children in Dungannon. If children from Dungannon were to travel to Coalisland, they would require a new teacher and the cost would be the same. Therefore, I am not sure why those who have tabled the motion are getting so exercised about the cost to the public purse.

Furthermore, long-term unfilled places are a difficulty only experienced by English-medium schools in that area. The Department of Education has a duty to facilitate and encourage Irish-medium education, where there is an appropriate demand. As Irish-medium schooling cannot be catered for in a classroom where instruction

is through the medium of English, there is no other option but to establish Irish-medium provision. The fact that there may be long-term unfilled places in schools that instruct through the medium of English should not impact on Irish-medium education as a parental choice. However, that is the case in Dungannon.

It has been determined by the Department of Education since the Good Friday Agreement that P1 stand-alone school enrolment — in accordance with EU guidelines on approval for grant-aided schools — should be self-sustainable. That means that Irish-medium provision would not have a negative impact on the education budget.

Therefore, the approach taken by the Department of Education to grant-aided approval is economically sound. It places the onus on the school to prove its sustainability with little risk to the Department or the taxpayer because the Department cannot make a commitment until the school proves its long-term viability.

It is regrettable that we are having this debate, and the same would apply to post-primary Irish-medium education. I agree with much of what has been said by Michelle O'Neill and Tommy Gallagher about Irish-medium provision. If a language cannot grow and develop in its own country, where can it develop?

I do not know whether the DUP is aware that there is an Irish-language unit at Harvard University. Indeed, there are many examples of such units across the globe. Many people who may not have any connection with Ireland are taught the Irish language.

It is incumbent on us to protect the Irish language and to encourage it to grow. Bearing in mind young people who have the opportunity to learn in the Irish medium, it is hugely regrettable that anyone would try —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Gildernew: No, I will not. It is hugely regrettable that anyone would get in the way of that —

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

Miss McIlveen: At a time when there are so many unfilled places in schools in Northern Ireland, it is quite reckless of the Minister to continue with proposals to provide grant aid to more Irish-medium schools. I know that Sinn Féin, et al, have lodged a petition of concern in respect of the motion.

Setting aside my — by now — well-known opinion of the Minister's obsession with the Irish-medium sector, it is nonsense to press ahead with the opening of such schools in the absence of a full investigation into area-based planning. The draft terms of reference for area-based planning are under consultation, and we have been seeking those terms of reference since the Minister made her statement on this matter in March.

I would have thought that a ministerial statement would imply some form of progress, but that invariably is not the case with this Minister. When she made her statement on 4 March, I asked her what the terms of reference were. However, unfortunately, I received no answer. Therefore, I tabled a question on 7 March, and I am still awaiting her answer, 67 days later.

One would think that I and my colleagues on the Education Committee would have been given the opportunity to provide some input into the drafting of those terms of reference — or at least given a chance to comment on them.

However, as usual, the Minister seems intent on treating all of us with such a level of contempt and discourtesy as truly beggars belief. Concern is heightened because the terms of reference have still not been agreed 70 days after the Minister made her statement. At least the Minister cannot lay the blame on the Committee.

4.30 pm

If Members cast their minds back to 4 March, they will recall that the Minister said that the area-based assessment was to be completed by October. Subsequently, it was to be consulted upon, and that consultation was to be completed by January 2009. Even if the terms of reference were settled today, there would be only five months to make the assessment. They will not be settled today, and, once again, we face the prospect of the Education Minister letting slip something that is of critical importance, which, again, will result in confusion and concern.

All Members should know that area-based planning is the linchpin of the Minister's plans, but she is allowing development to take place without that assessment being made and without reference to an area-based planning assessment. How can she do that? It is another example of her favouring one sector. Continuation in that manner flies in the face of everything that the Bain Report is about.

My colleague Lord Morrow said that there are 50,000 surplus places in schools throughout Northern Ireland, and it is anticipated that there will be a further 30,000 in the next 10 years. Despite that, the Minister is making the problem worse by opening more schools — regardless of the type. At a time when the schools estate should be rationalised, it is sheer folly and recklessness to be wasting public money in that way, and, given the utilisation of the club-bank scheme, it is also inequitable.

We must not forget the large number of Irish-medium schools in which the enrolment figures remain below the recommended Bain thresholds. As I said in a previous debate, chapter 9 of the Bain Report, 'Planning: a strategic approach', recommends area-based planning and states that the Department of Education should

proceed with it until the education and skills authority is established. It also states that:

"future school building projects should only be approved after area-based planning is established".

It is also worth highlighting the cost implications of establishing new Irish-medium schools. Schools with 50 pupils cost 200% more than average schools, and that rises to 300% when there are fewer than 20 pupils. However, Irish-medium schools with less than 20 pupils are continuing to receive funding. The impact of that on an already tight education budget is obvious. I can think of many other worthy projects on which that money could be spent and which would be of benefit to all sides of the community.

The Minister is pressing ahead with the proposal to establish an Irish-medium primary school in Dungannon without knowing how many pupils there will be or assessing the budget. The school's proposed opening date of 1 September 2008 epitomises recklessness. Sinn Féin should be concerned, but not about the motion; it should be more concerned about the policies of its Minister.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Níl aon amhras faoi, a LeasCheann Comhairle, ach go bhfuil éileamh an-mhór ar oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge, agus tá sé de dhualgas de réir dlí ar an Roinn Oideachais an t-éileamh sin a shásamh.

There is a considerable demand for Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland, and the Department of Education is legally bound to provide for that demand. It is not the Department or the Minister who plan the development of Irish-medium education in County Tyrone or anywhere else; development is driven by local demand from parents who want their children to be educated through the medium of Irish. That demand is factored into the overall development of Irish-medium education by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

The Department of Education is obliged to support any school that meets its criteria. Any school that does not meet the Department's criteria will not gain recognition. Neither the Minister nor the Department have the power to abide by this motion and abandon any viable proposal for a school in any sector that meets the Department's criteria.

Tá coiste réamhscolaíochta Dhún Geannain ag obair ó bhí 1996 ann ar fhorbairt na réamhscolaíochta sa bhaile, ag súil le Gaelscoil a bhunú ansin.

Since 1996, there has been an Irish-medium pre-school committee in Dungannon working on the development of Irish-medium education in that town.

Tá sé i gceist ag an choiste áitiúil bunscoil a bhunú má bhíonn go leor páistí acu le critéir na Roinne a shásamh; mura mbíonn, ní chuirfear an scoil ar bun.

The intention of that committee is to establish an Irish-medium primary school if there is a sufficient number of children to fulfil the Department of Education's criteria. If there is not a sufficient number, the school will not be set up.

At the moment, Coalisland is the nearest provider of Irish-medium education for people who live in Dungannon. Irish-medium education is not offered in any primary school in Dungannon. If a new school is not provided for the children attending the Irish-medium pre-school in Dungannon, they will attend Gaelscoil Uí Néill in Coalisland. Therefore, those children will not impact on existing primary schools in any part of the Dungannon area. At present, there are no surplus places in the Irish-medium school in Coalisland. If the children from Dungannon have to attend the school in Coalisland, an extra teacher will be needed there; however, that is hardly a huge expense.

According to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta the local committee is being advised by Cookstown District Council that post-primary Irish-medium education in Cookstown will be provided initially in the form of a unit in an existing school. If anything, that will strengthen a local school, rather than threaten it.

It is clear that the motion is misguided, and that the development of Irish-medium education in Dungannon and South Tyrone poses no threat to any other sector. The Assembly should be concerned about the number of long-term unfilled places in schools and the threat presented by falling rolls. However, the way to deal with that problem is not to attack other sectors, but to consider creative solutions that will help to ensure the survival of those schools, whether they are urban schools or small, rural schools. Schools would be better served by the House working in unity to solve the problems caused by falling rolls. The SDLP is ready and willing to engage in that work and I hope that other parties are so inclined.

Tá cúpla bomaite fágtha agam.

I have a few minutes left, and I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Irish-medium sector on the amazing progress that it has made since the foundation of the first Irish-medium school in Belfast in 1971.

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

Mr D Bradley: It is a story of hard work and —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order — the Member's time is up.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh míle maith agat. Most of the arguments have been covered in the course of the debate. I want to touch on the point that Dominic Bradley made about the legal requirement for the Department of

Education to provide Irish-medium education. Therefore, today's motion, regardless of whether it is passed — and the petition of concern will ensure that it is not passed — has no authority whatsoever.

The parties on the Benches opposite — that is, the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party — have claimed that the motion is not discriminatory against the Irish language. However, having listened to the debate, I can say that it is nothing other than discriminatory. That is unfortunate, because those parties understand neither the history of the language nor the movement that ensured that the language is alive today. Most of that movement was made up of Presbyterians from Belfast, who ensured that the Irish language is thriving. Many parents want their children educated in it. Therefore, whether we consider the provision of an Irish-language school in Dungannon, Belfast or in my own area of Lurgan, there is a requirement for that because there is a demand for it.

I recently visited the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff, and I had a lengthy meeting with a senior Welsh Conservative. During that meeting, we discussed many issues, including language. Welsh Conservatives are unionists — they believe in the union between Wales and Britain, and their politics are more aligned to those of the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party than they are to mine. I had an enlightening conversation with that member about the use of both the Welsh and the Irish languages.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he ever ask himself why unionists, in particular, are not endeared to the Irish language? Is there a remote possibility that Sinn Féin has politicised the Irish language in Northern Ireland?

Mr O'Dowd: I will address that point later.

That member told me that 10 years ago at a Welsh Conservative Party conference, someone would have been booed off the stage for speaking Welsh. However, delegates are now expected to speak at least some Welsh in their contributions. That is a measure of how far the Welsh language has progressed. The hostility that existed 10 or 14 years ago is beginning to evaporate. The Welsh-medium sector is now thriving — small schools that have been set up in villages, rural areas and towns across Wales are flourishing because parents want their children to be educated through that medium.

Mr Morrow asked why unionism is so hostile to the Irish language. That is a question that he also has a responsibility to answer. He should not say that, just because Sinn Féin is pro-Irish language, the DUP will be hostile to it. That is the politics of negativity, and it does not make sense. I do not approach an issue and say that, just because the DUP supports it, I will oppose

it. Any issue should be thought through, and its merits should be considered.

Were I to sit on the unionist Benches, and if I wanted to call Sinn Féin's bluff, I would take ownership of the Irish language, I would learn and speak it, and I would get involved with the sector. Unionists should not be negative about Sinn Féin's involvement with the Irish language.

The issue is related to the previous debate. It is not a Sinn Féin conspiracy; Sinn Féin is not responsible for ensuring that the Irish language thrives. We have played our part in it, it is part of our manifesto, and we will continue to pursue it. The SDLP supports it, and thousands of people who have no political allegiance send their children to Irish-medium schools. They want to continue to do so, not because of some sort of political plot against the Democratic Unionist Party or the Ulster Unionist Party, but because they have a passion for the language. Unionists should not fear the language; they should learn about it. I do not mean that they should understand the words; rather, they should try to understand what the language is about. Doing so would demystify the issue for them.

Clarification of the motion is required. Are the proposers opposed to Irish-language provision in Dungannon, or are they opposed to the provision of a school in Dungannon? My understanding is that there are no concrete proposals for a school in Dungannon. There is a request for Irish-medium provision in Dungannon, which is completely different.

I echo my colleague Michelle O'Neill's comments. I am disappointed that Arlene Foster — who, no matter how she tries to separate her roles, is the Minister of the Environment — can afford to spend two hours and 30 minutes in the Chamber debating a discriminatory motion when there is more important work to be done in her Department.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I am out of time, so I am finished.

Mr Storey: I support the motion, and I thank my colleagues Lord Morrow and Arlene Foster for tabling it.

I want to place on record our sadness that the SDLP tabled a petition of concern. It is sad that Mr Gallagher, whether the instigator or the fall guy, has grasped the wrong end of the stick. He has twisted the situation out of context for party political gain. He stated that the DUP is trying to turn the clock back, and he said that all elected representatives have a responsibility to show leadership and to adopt a positive approach to education issues. The Member should apply his own rules. By clouding the argument, he is defaulting on his duty to his constituency to fight for the sustainability of rural schools in the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors.

4.45 pm

Members who signed the petition of concern were wrongly advised. The DUP does not attempt, and has never attempted, to deny parental choice in education. It does, however, believe in fair play. It believes that there should be equality on the issue, but the Minister is not giving us that equality.

Mr Gallagher: The Member raised the matter of fair play. I mentioned fairness in my contribution, and I am keen to see the preservation of all our schools and the development of the four sectors: controlled; maintained; integrated; and Irish medium. That is a fair basis, but the Member said that Irish-medium schools should be excluded in order to concentrate on integrated, controlled and maintained schools. That is not fair.

Mr Storey: The comments from John O'Dowd and Tommy Gallagher demonstrate that they do not understand the DUP position. This is not about the eradication of the Irish-medium sector. Remember that, each year, £20 million is spent on the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland.

Dominic Bradley said that that system has been in existence in Northern Ireland since 1971. It is 2008, so one would assume that the Irish-medium sector would be a large, thriving school estate that would vastly increased in numbers in the intervening years. However, Irish-medium schools have experienced no more of an increase than other sectors have, even the integrated sector. We need, therefore, to keep our feet on the ground. When considering the importance of the Irish language, the Irish Republic —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: Is the Member aware that statistics demonstrate that the fastest-growing education sector in Northern Ireland is the Irish-medium sector?

Mr Storey: I doubt that that is the case, given the small number of schools that we have in Northern Ireland. However, it costs £20 million a year to run those schools.

In the Irish Republic, a vote was held in Dingle. That is a tourist attraction, and a place that seeks to use the Irish language. There was a lobby to change the name, and this is probably the only Irish that I know, to An Daingean. Did the people of Dingle decide to go down that road? No, they decided to retain the English name.

Those on the opposite Benches continually rehearse the argument that, somehow, the DUP is against the Irish language. I shall make it abundantly clear that that is not the case. In my study at home, I have a book — a Protestant catechism in Irish — that was given to me by Éamon Ó Cuív's father, who was a lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin. It is of absolutely no value to

me other than that it was given to me as a gift. I need Éamon to translate it so that I might understand exactly what it says.

This debate is not an attack on the Irish-medium sector — it is about fairness. On 4 March 2008, the Minister told us that she would introduce a new sustainable-schools policy. We are still waiting to witness that.

Lord Morrow: The Minister makes many promises.

Mr Storey: Lord Morrow is absolutely right — the Minister has made a vast array of promises but has delivered nothing. However, when it comes to assisting the Irish-medium sector, the Minister is the first person out of the blocks. She will spend all her time, effort and energy in assisting that sector. She attended a conference in Dublin and spent most of her time speaking in Irish. Some people at that conference decided that they had had enough and left. They were not there to hear the Minister speak in Irish but to hear the issues being addressed.

My honourable friend Lord Morrow is absolutely right — Members are in this position because Sinn Féin has politicised the Irish language.

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

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo labhairt faoi Ghaelscoileanna, nó is cuid luachmhar dár gcóras oideachais iad. Tá dualgas reachtúil ar mo Roinn oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge a chothú agus a éascú, agus tá tiomantas don Ghaeilge i gCairt na hEorpa do Theangacha Réigiúnacha nó Mionlaigh i gcás ina meastar go leor daltaí a bheith ann. Tá rún agam a chinntiú go gcomhlíontar an dá dhualgas seo.

I welcome the opportunity to speak about Irish-medium schools, which are a valuable part of our educational landscape. Following a commitment in the Good Friday Agreement, a statutory duty was placed on my Department to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. In addition, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which came into force in July 2001, contains a commitment to education in the Irish language where the numbers are considered sufficient. I intend to ensure that both of those obligations are fulfilled.

The Irish language is one of Europe's oldest indigenous languages. It is a common heritage for all the people of this island — the island of Ireland. The resurgence of the Irish language, particularly in the North but throughout the island, is a tribute to families, parents, teachers and Irish-language activists. I praise the work of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta on this subject.

The issue of Irish-language rights provides everyone with the unique opportunity to demonstrate real leadership

and a willingness to embrace their neighbours who wish to use the Irish language. For example, many Presbyterians are proud of the role that Irish speakers from their Church have played in the preservation and development of the language. I hope to see a future where, once again, many more Presbyterians play a role. I was invited recently to an event in the Presbyterian Church about Presbyterians and the Irish language. I attended, and it was a wonderful event.

People from all faiths and none celebrate our language, along with those that were born in our country and those who have chosen to live here.

Agus ní amháin Preisbitéirigh, ach daoine ó gach aon chreideamh agus daoine gan chreideamh; daoine a rugadh anseo agus na nua-Éireannaigh.

Recently, I was in Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, which was founded by a Presbyterian Minister. It is part of the Gaeltacht quarter. People made reference to the fact that the west coast of Ireland is the only Gaeltacht of Ireland. There is a Gaeltacht in west Belfast, and it is a Gaeltacht quarter. I was with people from the New York Comptroller's Office in the Irish-language centre, and they saw the vibrancy and dynamism of the Gaeltacht — the cultural quarter.

Irish-medium education is a distinctive part of the education system and it aims to provide a range of vibrant settings, meeting the educational and linguistic needs of pupils. It is much more than simply English-medium education delivered through the Irish language. The desired outcome — high-quality education for children who are bilingual and who leave school competent and confident — is important at a time when value-added as a concept includes more than purely finance-related considerations. The enriching experience of having developed bilingualism provides an additional resource upon which those children can draw as they move forward in their lives.

More children and their parents are seeking the benefits of the Irish-medium experience. The Irish-medium sector is the fastest-growing sector in education here. The number of children receiving an Irish-medium education has increased by more than 10% in the past three years. Today, almost 3,400 pupils attend 34 grant-aided Irish-medium schools and units attached to English-medium schools. Those figures do not take into account the children who do not have a post-primary, Irish-medium school to go to. It is also a dynamic sector in the South of Ireland.

Such development has not taken place without significant contributions and sacrifices from children and parents alike. Despite that dedication, the sector faces serious problems as regards facilities and support structures because of systematic neglect since the foundation of Irish-medium schools. That position was recognised by George Bain in the strategic review of

education, which recommended that there should be a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education.

As a result of that recommendation, my Department has been undertaking a wide-ranging review of its policies on Irish-medium education. The review addresses legacy issues facing the sector and sets it on a more sustainable and equitable footing. Although I appreciate that it is not yet the case in the controlled sector, I also believe that learning Irish at an English-medium school provides a bridge to a more inclusive future. I have been delighted on many occasions, when visiting schools in the controlled sector, to have been greeted by children and their teachers in Irish. It happened to me last week on one of my visits. I would like to thank those schools for the generosity that they have shown; it is in stark contrast to the lack of generosity in the motion.

I appreciate the open-minded approach of all those schools, and their generosity of spirit to the Irish language. I hope that some day Irish will be taught in all schools here, and that its cultural benefits will be available to every child as they want it.

Molaim an cur chuige fadtéarmach sna scoileanna seo agus a n-oscailteacht don Ghaeilge. Tá súil agam go mbeidh an Ghaeilge á múineadh i gach scoil anseo agus go mbeidh a buntáistí cultúrtha ar fáil do gach páiste.

The motion relates to two specific development proposals for schools in Dungannon and Cookstown. There is a statutory requirement for a development proposal to be published when a school is being newly established, being closed, or undergoing a significant change that alters its character or size. Proposals can be initiated by the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Council for Integrated Education, Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta, an individual school, or other interested parties. It is important to remember that I do not initiate development proposals.

In this instance, the Southern Education and Library Board published two development proposals, relating to Irish-medium schools in Dungannon and the wider south Tyrone area, on 14 April. The proposals have been published at the request of the boards of governors of the respective schools. The proposals are to award grant-aided status to Coláiste Speiríní, which opened as an independent school in Cookstown on 3 September 2007, and to establish a new grant-aided Irish-medium primary school in Dungannon, to be known as Bunscoil Uí Chléirigh, from 1 September 2008.

Publication of a development proposal initiates a two-month period during which the public may send comments or objections to my Department. As soon as possible after that period, my officials will assemble all the relevant facts and pass them to me to decide on the proposals

Déantar measúnú ar gach togra forbartha de réir a thuilteanais agus déantar measúnú ar thograí do scoileanna nua maidir le comhchritéir inmhharthanacha.

All development proposals are considered on their individual merits, and proposals for new schools are considered in relation to a common set of viability criteria. Once a proposal is published, the process requires that a decision be taken. There is no facility in that statutory process to provide for the deferment of a decision on a proposal or the placing of a moratorium on education authorities or others bringing forward new proposals. *[Interruption.]*

Everyone is getting very giddy; it is getting very late in the evening.

Each proposal must be considered carefully, taking account of the wishes of parents, the potential implications of the proposal, the availability of alternative suitable provision in the area, and the expected viability of the pupil intakes.

The consultations on the two current proposals will end in mid-June. I will take decisions as soon as possible thereafter, in light of the relevant factors in each case and the comments that have been made during the consultation. I hope that people understand that I have been fair in relation to Irish-medium and integrated education. My Department has a statutory duty; there is no favourable treatment. All that is happening at the moment is that the Irish-medium and integrated sectors are being treated in a fair and equitable manner. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Foster: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; danke schön, merci, go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. *[Interruption.]*

I thought that that would get a reaction.

In reply to a point made by John O'Dowd, I want to refer him to the development proposals that are mentioned in the motion. They talk about the creation of new buildings, and that is the issue surrounding this motion.

I wish to be very clear, because Trevor Lunn and others have been confused about the motion, which Lord Morrow and I tabled after we were lobbied by a small controlled school in the South Tyrone area. Staff at that school were, and remain, concerned by the huge number of school closures in South Tyrone and Fermanagh.

5.00 pm

Michelle O'Neill and John O'Dowd should know that, whatever my ministerial role, I will always represent the constituents of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. They might find that a difficulty, but I want to put on record that I consider my role as a constituency MLA just as important as my role as a Minister in the Executive.

In moving the motion, Lord Morrow said that it was not clear how many pupils would take up places in the

new school buildings that are proposed for September 2008. He raised the issue of equality and said that that might be tested in another place. I regret to say that that will probably be the case. Lord Morrow also said that the review of Irish-medium education would not be completed until the end of May 2008, yet we are pushing ahead with development proposals for two new school buildings.

Sammy Wilson raised the issue of the quality of education that is being provided in the schools in question, and mentioned concerns raised by inspection reports. That should concern the Minister of Education, if she is interested in the provision of Irish-medium schooling.

The issue is how to deal with the huge number of empty desks at schools, and Fermanagh and South Tyrone have their share of them.

Michelle O'Neill talked about the Irish language as a native language. We are all entitled to our opinion, but how does opening new schools, when there are so many earmarked for closure in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, fit into a shared future? Most, if not all, CCMS schools teach Irish already, and provision exists to set up Irish-medium units in those schools, yet we are told that new buildings are needed to do that. At the same time, many other schools in Fermanagh and South Tyrone struggle to get the go-ahead for their new buildings.

That brings me to the subject of Devenish College in Enniskillen, which has been waiting for a long time for its new build. The school is trying to do the best that it can with what it has. The Minister should visit Devenish College to see how it has coped since the closure of the Duke of Westminster School in Ballinamallard, which was accepted by her as a development proposal.

The Minister knows, and my colleague Lord Morrow can testify, that Dungannon Primary School makes great provision for a large ethnic minority in the Dungannon area. I am amazed that buildings for Irish-medium schools are being given the go-ahead when finance is needed by schools that make such excellent provision.

Michelle O'Neill went on to say that Irish-medium schools are filling a gap in the school education system. That raises a question: where are those children at this moment? If they are not at school, social services may want to know why.

We heard about rights for the Irish medium, but absolutely nothing about responsibilities — but that is the norm for Sinn Féin. Mrs O'Neill said that she would support the development of schools.

Tom Elliott supported the motion. Francie Brolly made the same argument as I did when he said that there is absolutely no need to build new schools. I could not agree with him more. It is much more

cost-effective to deal with the proposals by utilising units of existing schools. We also heard from Tom Elliott about the extended schools cuts.

The MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Michelle Gildernew, told us how emotional she was about the provision of Irish-medium schools in her constituency. I can tell her that I am emotional about the Minister's extended schools cuts in Fermanagh and South Tyrone that mean that many children there have lost their after-schools clubs.

I must say that I have not heard the Minister of Agriculture — the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone — raise her voice to object to that. She tells us that she is the MP for the entire constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Therefore, I look forward to her comments on that issue.

Tommy Gallagher explained why he put down a petition of concern: he believes that it is in the interests of fairness and common justice. I look forward to his support when the people in the controlled sector who have been discriminated against take their case to another place.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, I am not against anyone's learning the Irish language. Every year, thousands of people do so through CCMS. However, I am against the Department of Education ploughing money and resources into newbuild schools that may only have a handful of pupils, while on the other hand it is adamant, through the board, that it will close schools in my constituency that may well, as is the case at Carntall Primary School, have more pupils that they are allowed to admit because they are deemed too small by the board. Meanwhile, new schools are being opened with as few as 17 pupils.

Trevor Lunn discussed sustainable schools and said that he sought an answer from the Minister on whether all schools would be treated fairly and equally. He said that, otherwise, he would not vote against the motion. I hope that Mr Lunn listened carefully, because he did not get an answer on that issue.

Ian McCrea talked about how Maghera High School is under threat from the Department and referred to his constituency colleague Pasty McGlone, who, as Chairperson of the Environment Committee, has never once misused the Irish language to me as Minister of the Environment. I pay tribute to him for that, because there are other Members in the Chamber who politicise the Irish language. That is the fault of those who sit on the opposite Benches.

As I have said, Michelle Gildernew told the House that the motion is discriminatory. I am disappointed that, when controlled-sector schools are being closed across her constituency, I do not hear her voice being raised for the children who, as a result, must travel many miles to get to their nearest school.

Michelle McIlveen talked about the reckless nature of the Minister's proposals and stressed that there was a need to consider area-based planning as the key to making progress. She acknowledged that the Minister favours the Irish sector. Dominic Bradley told the House that the Education Department is legally bound to provide Irish-medium education. I have no difficulty with that. However, it could be done through units, rather than through the provision of new schools with the associated capital costs.

During the debate on post-primary transfer, Mr Bradley talked a lot about sustainability, although — understandably, when one considers his standpoint — the House did not hear much from him about sustainability with regard to this motion. Children who must travel to from Dungannon to Coalisland for Irish-medium education do not have half as long a journey as children in Fermanagh and South Tyrone will have to get to their nearest controlled school when all of the schools in that sector have been closed.

John O'Dowd also referred to the legal requirement on Irish-medium education. He then went on to say that the motion would have no effect, which bemused me. If that is the case, what is the need for a petition of concern? There we are, Mr Deputy Speaker. He discussed the Presbyterian Church's role in the Irish language. I thank God once again that I am an Anglican. He also mentioned the Welsh Conservatives and referred to the argument about the use of language as a political tool. He said that we should not fear the language: I do not. That is specifically why I used that small bit of Irish that I have picked up from the other side of the House during the past year. However, I will not allow the children of Fermanagh and South Tyrone to be treated as second-class citizens, which is what is happening at present.

Mervyn Storey debunked many of the myths that surround the issue. He said that the motion is about fairness. I firmly believe that it is about providing fairness for all of the children whom the Minister talks about from time to time. I want my three children to have the best possible education in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I know that the Minister will understand that. However, I ask her to rethink her proposals.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 34; Noes 29.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch,

Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr I McCrea and Miss McIlveen.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mrs McGill, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

OTHER:

Ms Lo.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Gallagher and Ms J McCann.

<i>Total votes</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>34 [54.0%]</i>
--------------------	-----------	-------------------	-------------------

<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>0 [0.0%]</i>
--------------------------	-----------	-------------------------	-----------------

<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>34 [100.0%]</i>
-----------------------	-----------	----------------------	--------------------

<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>0 [0.0%]</i>
--------------------	----------	-------------------	-----------------

Question accordingly negatived.

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

Sustainable Energy

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has written to advise me that he is unavoidably absent due to diary commitments. He regrets that he is not able to respond to the motion, and he has arranged for the Minister of the Environment, Mrs Arlene Foster, to respond on his behalf.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. 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.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the recommendations in the review of the Sustainable Energy Market; and calls on the Executive to ensure that there is closer co-operation between different Departments to ensure that sustainable energy, including renewable energy, is developed in such a way that benefits the environment, and tackles the socio-economic problems that face families due to fuel poverty.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment. Although the motion was tabled before the recent increase in oil prices, the subsequent rise in gas prices and the anticipated rise in electricity prices, given the rising energy demand, the case already existed for the Government to reassess their options in relation to meeting their targets for reducing carbon emissions, and increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage. Those factors must be considered in the context of benefiting the environment, tackling climate change and combating the ongoing misery faced by people who live in fuel poverty.

Climate change issues constitute a debate in themselves. Therefore, I will only mention them briefly. There are strong moral, economic, social and environmental reasons why Ireland and, indeed, all countries must sign up to cutting global emissions. We are all aware of how climate change already destroys the lives and livelihoods of many of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, and, as global temperatures rise further, that trend is set to continue. Climate change is a major threat to development and to the progress that has been made in fighting poverty in poorer countries. Unless countries, including Ireland, sign up to the targets required to reduce global emissions, they will be responsible for subjecting the world's poor to greater vulnerability to disease, hunger and exploitation.

Although the review of the sustainable energy market found that efforts by stakeholders and delivery organisations have gone some way to improving energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewables, there are still opportunities and potential for further improvements. For instance, the electricity-generation fuel mix has changed, and continues to change, rapidly, and large-scale renewable energy resources are in operation, including onshore-wind- and wave-generated electricity and biomass; however, there is still no large-scale generation using offshore wind, solar or waste resources.

In the North, the domestic sector is still the largest energy user, followed by the industrial, commercial and public sectors. Furthermore, barriers to small-scale renewable energy generation must still be overcome, particularly barriers to ensuring the motivation and financial support for increasing uptake in private households.

That must be accompanied by raising awareness of energy-efficiency measures.

Once again, there has been a sharp rise in fuel prices; oil prices have soared, and the recent announcement by Phoenix Gas that it has increased prices by 28% has put low-income households at crisis point. One in three households in the North of Ireland is experiencing fuel poverty; the cost of living is rising, and people are paying more for energy in spite of earning lower than average wages. As people struggle to meet rising food bills and fuel costs, they are being told to expect another rise in the cost of electricity. It has been estimated that 42% of the population in the North of Ireland will soon be living in fuel poverty.

Households on low incomes and houses with poor energy efficiency and high energy costs create fuel poverty. However, fuel poverty does not exist in a vacuum: it is exacerbated by other forms of poverty and social and economic disadvantage. Pensioners; people with disabilities, and families with young children or who are on low incomes are most vulnerable and face the choice between heating their homes and putting food on their tables. More people are getting themselves into debt and some are losing their homes because they have not been able to keep up with increases in mortgage repayments. In my West Belfast constituency, I know people with young families who have had their homes repossessed and have had to live in cramped and overcrowded living conditions with other family members while they wait, on the social housing list, to be rehoused.

Through the Programme for Government and the fuel-poverty strategy, the Executive have set targets to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and in non-vulnerable households by 2016. It is important that there is a joined-up approach to the

problem, including the development of sustainable renewable-energy sources that will have a positive impact on economic, social and environmental factors. Energy companies also have a responsibility to keep their prices as low as possible. Unregulated fuel suppliers must engage with customers who are in financial difficulty, rather than disconnecting supplies when people cannot keep up with rising prices.

My colleague Martina Anderson was recently in Venezuela, and the Government there are willing to offer oil in return for expertise in areas such as agriculture and town planning.

Ms Anderson: The Member mentioned the staggering 28% price increase by Phoenix Gas, which is a disgrace. Oil prices are at an all-time high and are continuing to soar, which means that the situation for most families is becoming increasingly bleak. It is against that backdrop that Save the Children has called for the introduction of seasonal heating grants of £100 per child. The Housing Executive has also launched an investigation into the impact of rising fuel costs on child poverty. Does the Member agree that when the results of that investigation are published, and we have been told that they will contain proposals to tackle the problem, the appropriate Ministers should deal with the situation? The issue of rising fuel costs should unite all Members, because it is a disgrace that families who live in a so-called twenty-first century western democracy cannot afford to keep their children warm.

As has been stated, we have no power over the fuel companies and we are operating within a limited budget that will never be sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for all our people. Therefore, we must think outside the box. Does the Member agree that a focus is required on renewables and sustainable-energy sources as a long-term solution? I agree with the Member and call on the Executive to enter into a trade agreement with Venezuela.

As the Member mentioned, I was recently in Venezuela, where the Government have a proven track record of providing low-cost oil to areas of social disadvantage in the US and elsewhere in the world. I met senior members of the Venezuelan Government and oil company officials and have no doubt that they are keen to explore the possibilities of entering into an arrangement with the Executive. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Shannon: The Member's time is up. *[Laughter.]*
5.30 pm

Ms J McCann: Mortgage lenders, too, have a responsibility. Homes are being repossessed, so the lenders have a responsibility to give time and latitude to people who cannot keep up with mortgage repayments and enable them to keep a roof over their heads.

Poverty can create other problems. Children living in homes that have no heating, or less food on the table, find it more difficult to concentrate on education. Their health and well-being is also at stake. The recent investment conference has been roundly welcomed, and it is hoped that opportunities will be generated for all — in particular the more disadvantaged in society.

The review of the sustainable energy market has made a number of recommendations. Those recommendations, coupled with Departments working together on the serious issues of fuel and other forms of poverty, and working towards targets to deal with climate change, will be a first step towards creating a sustainable-energy sector that will benefit the environment and tackle the social and economic problems faced by families because of fuel poverty.

I urge Members to support the motion and the amendment. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Gallagher: I support the broad thrust of the motion. There is a growing awareness of the effects of global warming, and the rising cost of fossil fuels means that urgent action is required to diversify energy supplies and to look towards renewables in particular to meet some of our energy needs and to help reduce carbon emissions.

It is also clear that we must do what we can to improve conditions for those on low incomes and those burdened by ever-escalating energy costs. I welcome the review of sustainable energy that has been carried out, and I broadly welcome its recommendations.

We should not, however, adopt an isolationist approach on this issue; the consequences of global warming and rising fuel costs are too great. The matter must be examined on an all-island basis, and that is why the SDLP has tabled the amendment, which refers to an all-island approach. The concept of the single electricity market is now a reality. It is central to the development of the energy sector for the future. We must invest in and plan for our energy needs, including renewable energy, on an all-island basis.

There is a tremendous capacity for the development of wind resources. This island has the second-best wind resource in Europe, and it has the potential to produce much more of its energy from renewable sources. Tidal energy and biomass have much potential that can be harnessed to deliver sustainable, renewable energy. It is imperative that both Governments work together to develop and harness the full potential of renewables by addressing the restrictions that are currently in place.

Recently, I tabled a question to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — and I note the apology that the Minister has sent — about the development of renewables. It was disappointing to read in the Minister's response that there are currently no plans to adopt a single approach to encouraging renewables

development across the island. Much can and should be done to facilitate the producers of renewable energy in trading across the border — whether that is Northern producers trading into the South, or Southern producers trading in surpluses to the North.

The all-island grid study is the first comprehensive assessment of the capacity of the power system and transmission network on the island of Ireland to absorb large amounts of energy produced from renewables. The study examines the costs and benefits associated with sourcing increased electricity from renewable energy.

The creation of an accessible and viable all-Ireland market for electricity that is produced from renewables — which could be sourced on either side of the border — could pave the way for the two Governments not only to achieve their targets for sustainable energy and carbon reduction, but to exceed them.

There is no doubt that climate change is one of this century's most serious long-term threats. The evidence suggests that increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases are a major contributor to climate change, which will have serious and wide-reaching effects on people, land and wildlife, including marine wildlife. The recent Stern Review Report on the Economics of Climate Change highlighted some of the threats and the need for action to address the problems. We may already be too late to reverse some of the consequences of climate change, but, if we do not act urgently, the cost will be even greater.

Earlier in the year, the National Trust warned us that the Giant's Causeway is threatened by rising sea levels and coastal erosion. Indeed, that is not the only coastal area in Northern Ireland that is under threat. It is clear that we must take urgent action.

The motion also mentions rising fuel costs. Creating a diverse energy supply is important, given current energy costs. It now costs over £280 — which is almost £300 — for a minimum fill of oil for a household. Last month, Phoenix Natural Gas advised of its planned price increases of around 30%. Furthermore, electricity prices are set to rise later in the summer, with the possibility of further increases throughout the year.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the number of households that are considered to be living in fuel poverty has remained static. If there were no intervention programmes, that figure would be much higher. The growing energy bills, together with other demands on household budgets, will have a devastating impact on low-income households.

As we know, Minister Foster has responsibility for planning. She has made herself available for the debate, and she will probably be interested in my comments on planning. An urgent overhaul of the planning system is needed if we are to increase the amount of energy that is sourced from renewables. I take the point that the

Department has already put in train a review of the planning process. Planning applications for wind farms and turbines are stuck in the planning system, some for as long as two years, others for even longer.

In response to a recent question, I was informed that the Planning Service had still not made a decision on more than 18 applications that were first lodged over 24 months ago. Another 16 applications have been waiting for more than a year. The outworkings of that are that companies that invest many millions of pounds in renewable energy may get fed up and look for other suitable locations for their wind-farm developments. There is no doubt that, in many other countries, those planning applications are processed in a much shorter time frame. We need look no further than across the border, where it takes around three months to process such an application.

If we are serious about developing sustainable energy sources and about meeting the climate-change targets, our planning system must be more responsible and must be capable of meeting the needs of the renewables sector in a more timely fashion.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion and the amendment. Only last October, in this Chamber, we discussed sustainable energy development and the need for bigger steps to bring the Province into line with the rest of the UK and western Europe.

Aa' hae spauk o' hoo in Strenferd we wur testing oot a tied turbine an this hiss' bin pit in an we wull sinn' ken hoo guid it is. It is cleer that we hae tae tak steps tae reduce oor kerbin futprint in Norlin Airlan. Tha duti lies in tha hauns o' tha drive an poower providers an em pleased that DETI wull be puttin oan pressur tae tha poower kumpanies throo tha renewable obligation tae bring aboot 12% lectricity by 2012.

I mentioned in that debate the testing of a tide turbine on Strangford Lough. That has been installed, and we will soon see how successful it is. We must take steps to reduce our carbon footprint in Northern Ireland. Responsibility for that also rests with the energy providers, and I am pleased that DETI will be pressing the energy companies, through the renewables obligation, to source 12% of electricity through a renewable source by 2012.

I congratulate the Minister for Social Development, although she is not present, whose Department has installed solar panels in Housing Executive homes when the heating systems have been changed. As a result, during warm weather there is no need for electricity to heat water, and the saving for the household, as well as to the environment, is considerable.

I am no Einstein — no scientist, in fact — and some of the mumbo jumbo that we hear on this subject is hard to follow. However, all of us can understand the basic principle, which is that reduced CO2 emissions

mean more help for the environment. Furthermore, I know that less energy use means more savings for my pocket. That simple theory has not been expounded upon enough for the ordinary man and woman: in saving the environment and playing their part in the reduction of emissions, they can offset the difficulty in making ends meet that increases in gas and energy prices have caused.

In my constituency office, we switched our supplier to Airtricity, a company that sources power from renewables. That resulted in significant savings, which can be replicated in other offices and in homes. There should be a concerted advertising campaign to make people aware of the basic facts, and of the organisations that offer help and advice to make homes more economical and more environmentally friendly. One of those is the Energy Saving Trust, which assesses how a home loses money and needlessly damages the environment.

For those with internet access, it is easy to discover that it is possible to save £9 per year per light bulb by using an energy-saving bulb that will last up to 12 times longer than a regular one. There are, therefore, savings all round. Similarly, it can be learned that up to two-thirds of heat can be lost through walls and lofts, and how cavity-wall insulation can substantially reduce such loss. In addition, a boiler is responsible for 60% of household carbon emissions, and a switch to an energy-saving boiler will save up to £200 a year in energy costs.

However, for those who are hit hardest by fuel poverty — those on housing estates, and the elderly — turning down a thermostat by 1°C will save about £50 a year and reduce CO₂ output. Those who most need that information are not getting it, and it must be made available to help people to save money and to eradicate fuel poverty, which is the aim of the Assembly.

DARD has said that it aims to “educate” 1,000 rural homes by 2009. That objective must be extended to include the entire Province by all Departments to ensure that people understand what can be achieved by changing the small things — and small changes lead to big savings. People must also be made aware that there is a grant scheme to help with the cost of such changes. Departments must work together in a concerted effort to educate the people of the Province who, by doing their bit for the environment, will make life easier for themselves.

Through the efforts of teachers, children now follow their parents, switching off lights and filling kettles with only as much water as is needed, because they have a genuine desire to save polar bears. That, however, is not enough. Families across the Province should be made aware of the dual benefits of helping the environment and saving money. That, as much as anything, will put Northern Ireland on an even keel

with the rest of the United Kingdom and might even push us further up the energy-saving scale. People want to do their bit, and when they learn that that will save them money, they will be even more eager to relieve the strain on mounting fuel bills.

I support the motion and the amendment, and urge Departments to co-operate fully to ensure that we keep our beautiful country healthy for future generations to enjoy. For so many years, we have taken it for granted.

5.45 pm

Mr Cree: I thank the Members who secured this important debate. Climate change is possibly the greatest medium to long-term threat to security. Equally, fuel poverty is one of the most immediate and pressing issues facing thousands of people in Northern Ireland every day. This winter, if fuel prices continue to increase, countless more people will be driven into fuel poverty. The two issues must be considered together, as they are interlinked. The long-term reduction in fuel poverty and the amelioration of climate change lie in the growth of sustainable energy sources in Northern Ireland, Europe and, indeed, throughout the world.

The Minister has had the opportunity to set courageous and innovative targets and to embrace inventive ideas. Society at large supports renewable energy and environmental issues. The Minister is in charge of a matter that should not fall prey to some of the unique politicking that exists in this place. It is for that reason that many people are disappointed that more has not been done. The target of having 12% of electricity generated from renewable resources by 2012 is welcome, even if it does not go beyond the direct rule targets in DETI's strategic energy framework and in the Northern Ireland sustainable development strategy. However, that target is not very ambitious. Scotland has a target to produce 40% of its electricity from renewable resources by 2020, and that is matched by Germany and bettered by Sweden. Indeed, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment admitted that:

“We must be more ambitious in setting future renewable energy targets.”

The publication of the review of the sustainable energy market, and this debate, provide a unique opportunity for the Minister to reaffirm his commitment, to outline the targets that he hopes to achieve above and beyond the targets in the Programme for Government, and to detail how he intends to achieve them.

Energy suppliers are crucial to Northern Ireland's social and economic development. Northern Ireland is in a unique position, as its natural resources could help it to develop into a renewable energy leader in the European market. The grid study published in January 2008 showed that it is feasible to harness up to 42% of power from renewable energy and that wind is the cheapest and most readily available resource. Although

there are some local issues with wind generation, we should do more to tap into that economic, environmental and social opportunity.

I welcome the steps that have been taken to introduce a single energy market with the Republic of Ireland. There have also been some innovative individual projects in Northern Ireland, yet there is still a lack of integrated, sustainable strategies in DETI and in the Executive at large to ensure the increase that is needed.

Fuel poverty is a serious and increasing problem that affects the most vulnerable in our society. The cost of fossil fuels is higher than ever, and the situation seems to be worsening. Pensioners and low-income families will face serious health problems this winter if the situation does not improve. The Minister for Social Development and the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty have done excellent work on grants and energy efficiency measures. In the short term, that is the only way forward, but more needs to be done. However, it is of paramount importance that the long-term energy security of, and competition in, our energy market is increased. Only that will ensure that fuel poverty is reduced in the long term, and Northern Ireland has the opportunity to do that while increasing our green economy.

We are in danger of not maximising our potential to develop a green economy. The Prime Minister estimated that the overall added value of the low-carbon energy sector could be £3 trillion annually worldwide by 2050, and it could employ 25 million people. We must ensure that we gain the greatest possible chunk of the market. That will have positive environmental and socio-economic consequences for everyone in our society, especially for those who suffer from fuel poverty. However, we need innovative thinking and ambitious targets. I urge the Minister to start taking the necessary steps to grasp the opportunity that the grid study has given us. I support the motion.

Mr Ford: At the end of a day such as this, it is a pleasure to achieve unanimity in the Chamber. I am sure that the Minister of the Environment's contribution will not disturb that unanimity.

The motion mentions the environmental benefits of sustainable energy and the serious socio-economic problem of fuel poverty. Given the constituency that she represents, it is appropriate that Jennifer McCann concentrated on the latter. In the face of the current fuel poverty problem, and, as Leslie Cree said, the inevitability of continued increases in the price of fossil fuels, we must ensure that we do all that we can to tackle that problem. The Minister for Social Development recently outlined her role in tackling that problem to the House.

The problem will continue and it cannot be solved by the relatively modest measures that were funded under direct rule. The Assembly must make serious

changes to deal with the problem of fuel poverty to satisfy the needs of our society. The Minister of the Environment's response is interesting, although she is only one of several Ministers who might have been involved in the debate.

During recent media interviews, Lord Stern made it clear that if he were to rewrite the Stern Review today — only two years on — he would consider the problem to be more severe than he anticipated in 2006. If the Assembly does not tackle those major environmental issues, people who experience the greatest levels of poverty — whether in our own society or other parts of the world that are more affected by climate change — will suffer.

It is incumbent on us, as representatives of people who sometimes forget that they live in the European Union — the richest trading bloc in the world — to address the needs of our fellow citizens who experience the direst poverty. That fact is often forgotten during discussions about our requests to the Treasury for more funding. Moreover, we currently receive additional funding from Dublin for some of our infrastructure in the west. In reality, despite how we perceive our position in these islands, we are among the richest countries worldwide, and we contribute to the climate-change problems experienced by people elsewhere.

The key point of the motion is the need for co-ordination among Departments. It is a matter of serious concern that the extent of joined-up government has not reached the expected level. Each Department has a specific area of responsibility, and it is difficult to identify levels of co-ordination. The fact — dare I say it — that the second-largest party in the Executive wants an increase in joined-up government demonstrates that I am not making a cheap point on behalf of the opposition. How institutions are constructed and their level of co-ordination causes serious concern.

DETI has general responsibility for energy and, therefore, plays the leading role. I mentioned DSD's specific responsibilities for fuel poverty. DOE has a wider environmental responsibility, and DARD is responsible for the co-ordination of areas of greatest potential for sustainable energy. DFP has input on matters such as building regulations. Of those five Departments, DFP is, perhaps, the one that has done the least to recognise those points.

The reality is that this island is surrounded by some of the best tides and waves in the world for generating energy, with virtually the best wind-power possibilities in Europe — with the possible exception of Scotland. Our climate is ideal for growing biomass, whether willow or miscanthus. We need to maximise those opportunities to benefit our people and the wider world. The motion and the amendment highlight serious intent about how society should progress.

I received correspondence today from Ministers on some of the potential issues in respect of job creation. I discovered that the World Wildlife Fund in Scotland commissioned a report five years ago, which highlighted serious potential for job creation and scope for tackling poverty and environmental concerns.

It is regrettable that nothing similar has yet been published for Northern Ireland. However, the motion sends out the message that we must do something, and unite around it.

Mr G Robinson: Sustainable energy is undoubtedly a growth area for the Northern Ireland economy. The price of oil has escalated over the past few months, and gas and electricity prices have also risen. It is inevitable that we should seek to encourage the design, development, production and usage of sustainable-energy technology.

Northern Ireland has a well-educated and well-trained workforce that wants to work and is willing to retrain in order to work. We should capitalise on that greatest of all assets for any country in order to attract firms that produce the latest technologies. Solar panels, wind turbines and wave power will develop as our finite resources run out. Northern Ireland is at the start of an economically prosperous future, and we should be attracting new technologies that will develop and power our economic future. Of course, I suggest East Londonderry as an admirably suitable site for any manufacturers of such technologies.

The Minister and the rest of the Executive have not overlooked renewables in their future plans, with ventures such as the SeaGen tidal project in Strangford Lough. Various wind farms have been established, and more are at the planning stage. The dubious blessings of strong breezes and powerful waves are sustainable sources that could produce some of the electricity that we will need to power — literally — our economic growth. Our atmospheric conditions may suit the production of renewable energies, and we also have some of the highest levels of air quality in the United Kingdom. The use of sustainable energy will ensure that pollution levels are kept low and that the unique quality of Ulster air is maintained.

Renewable energy has many environmental benefits for Northern Ireland. We must ensure that we produce the technology that will maintain that position, and, as a result, create benefits for the economy and our citizens. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment recently said:

“Sustainable energy is a priority for government to ensure Northern Ireland has secure, reliable and competitive energy supplies for the future.”

The Moyle interconnector and the SEM are examples of how those words are becoming a reality. I congratulate the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for

ensuring that that is the case, and I know that he wants to keep sustainable energy high on the agenda.

The amount of energy produced by renewables is targeted to be increased from 3·8% in 2006-07 to 12% in 2012-13. That is an ambitious start, and the Minister will strive to ensure that it is met. I know that his Department stands ready to co-ordinate a concerted interdepartmental effort to maximise the energy produced from renewables, and I support him fully in his efforts. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the SDLP amendment. The timing of the motion is apt, bearing in mind the soaring price of oil. The public will expect the Assembly to show leadership on this issue, because the availability of energy has a massive impact on our quality of life, the economy, the environment and our mobility. We must work towards a situation in which we are much less reliant on oil, and we must be much more conservative in our use of energy in general.

We already lag behind other parts of Europe when it comes to renewable energy, and there must be more investment in that sector. Energy must be more affordable for all parts of society if we are to combat growing problems such as fuel poverty. There must be more joined-up working when it comes to encouraging the public to leave the car at home and use public transport, especially in rural areas. Government must ensure that using public transport is more attractive financially, and they must educate the public in that regard.

As previously stated, electricity, coal, oil and gas prices are all rising. Families are struggling because of price increases in food, petrol and mortgage repayments, and they must make choices between having food and having heat and light. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment must set out how he will support renewable-energy installers and develop what will be a key market in reducing our reliance on finite fuels.

Climate-change targets must be met, and we can make a significant contribution to that by increasing the amount of electricity that is generated from local, renewable sources. A large percentage of energy use is domestic, and that is where we must change our old habits by ensuring that everyone can avail themselves of affordable renewable energy and reduce domestic reliance on oil.

6.00 pm

We have some of the best wind resources in Europe, and we must ensure that electricity-grid and planning constraints are overcome. The Government in the South have set an ambitious target of generating 33% of their energy from renewable sources by 2020. There is no reason why that target could not be met across the island. Excellent R&D is taking place in our colleges and universities, and we have an opportunity to create

sustainable jobs in the rural and farming communities by incorporating a renewables market into rural diversification and the rural economy.

Ireland could, and should, be a leader in renewable energy. We should build on some of the good work that has been done to date, such as the Renewable Energy Installer Academy, which has already received commendable reports. That project should be protected and built upon to ensure that our renewable technology remains of the highest standard.

Generating sustainable energy, reducing our reliance on finite fuels and protecting the most vulnerable in society from fuel poverty are not the responsibilities of any one Department. DETI, DSD, DRD and all the other Departments must show joined-up planning and leadership to ensure that the forthcoming energy dilemmas do not detrimentally affect the economy, the environment or the well-being of the public. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Hamilton: I support the motion and the SDLP's amendment. At this late hour, and after so much has been said already, the respectable turnout for this debate is testimony to the sustainable energy of the Members who have stayed.

As has been said, this is a topical debate, given the recent 28% rise in the price of gas. As so much of our electricity is generated in gas-fired power stations, we anticipate that that price rise will have an impact on NIE's prices. Concern has been expressed in the motion, and around the House, about the anticipated knock-on effect of such price rises on people living in fuel poverty. We already anticipate that about 150,000 people will be living in fuel poverty, and that is a grave concern, given the rising cost of fossil fuels.

All Members have acknowledged today that wider issues are at stake in the discussion on energy, not least climate change, which has been talked about at length. There are other issues, such as the ongoing need to secure our energy supply, how long fossil fuels will last, and how dependent we can be on unstable regimes in the Middle East or Russian oligarchs for oil and gas supplies.

We must also face looming issues, such as the proposed EU renewable energy directive, and its target of 15% renewable-energy consumption. Opting in to that, or being forced to meet such targets by the UK Government, will put a massive burden and strain on Northern Ireland.

Although we all agree that concerted action on the issue is required, experience shows that it is not a simple matter of saying that something must be done, and it will be done. We cannot simply click our fingers and find that the matter has been sorted out overnight. Many major challenges and hard choices characterise every aspect of the energy issue. It is apt that the Minister of the Environment will be responding to the

motion in place of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, because many of the issues that are constantly raised affect her when she is wearing her hat as planning Minister.

There has been much talk today about how wealthy this country is in natural resources, and how those might be harnessed. However, if we examine those options, such as wind energy, it is not a simple matter, as Mr Gallagher said, of proposals being stuck in the planning system for an eternity. Some proposals remain stuck in the planning system for what seems like an eternity due to local objections.

The SeaGen prototype wave-energy project is in my constituency of Strangford, although Jim Wells argues that, because it is in Strangford Lough, it is closer to South Down. He is not here to defend his position, and I will not do so for him. However, even that very good project has met resistance and criticism about the way in which it might affect marine mammals. Indeed, there might even be somebody who is on constant seal watch at that facility.

Moving on to biofuels, which have been mentioned; one argument states that it is good for farmers to diversify into biofuels, while another states that they raise food prices and cause food shortages.

Energy from waste is another example of a proposal for a solution to the energy problem that is already on the table. That proposal, which employs chicken waste material, is meeting local opposition. Indeed, any energy-from-waste plant that comes through the public-sector route is likely to meet some resistance at ground level.

Even if we could harness all our obvious renewable energy opportunities, there are issues relating to the grid, which is where the all-island grid study comes in. First, a major investment would be required to increase the level of penetration of renewable energy to 42%. Secondly, there are infrastructure issues, as we have seen with respect to the interconnector — where there have been objections to something that would be useful to have. Given that my time is running out, I will leave nuclear power for another day.

In the case of virtually each and every renewable or sustainable energy scheme, one could argue that there is a need for it, and that we will need to consider some or all of the options at some stage; but the issue is not that simple. We must proceed realistically and at the right pace as the technology grows. It is not simply a matter of clicking our fingers and it will be done; people will object in one way or another to various schemes of this kind. However, those objections, and even issues such as fuel poverty, will pale in comparison to the alternative.

Mr McFarland: Sustainable energy is a complex issue, as we have heard so far, and I hope to provide some clarification now. We are interested in sustainable

energy because we have all been persuaded that if we do not change our ways, the world will come to an end — it is heating up due to global warming; our children will all end up frying if we do not do something about it now; and fossil fuels, we have been told, are running out.

Although we are panicking, the Americans do not seem to be troubled about the issue and they are refusing to sign up to the Kyoto protocol. China is building an extra coal-fired power station every day, and the Indian economy is expanding. Those countries should not be criticised for trying to make life better for their people, but while we are panicking about whether we need to downsize our cars, they are chucking all sorts of stuff into the atmosphere and making the problem worse.

There are two parallel ways to deal with this matter. On an individual level, we could, for example, insulate our houses better — and it is slightly weird that Reconnect, which was allowing people to do just that, has been pulled by the Executive. We could also fix solar panels to our roofs, but they are of limited value. We could downsize our cars and have the odd windmill outside our houses. Indeed, some Members may have seen the windmill that was on top of the hill close to here. It lasted for a while, but the owner has taken it down as it clearly was not profitable for him to have it working.

On a wider scale, we could have wind farms; we already have them on the Antrim Hills and in Tyrone. We could have tidal and wave power — and we have heard about SeaGen, which is probably the best option in the future for saving the planet. We could have hydro power — and Scotland has spent a lot of time flooding its highland valleys to provide hydro-electricity.

We could have biomass, where a lot of willow is grown and which may provide an opportunity for farmers who are worried about diversification. We could have biofuels — and there is a current craze for maize, which, sadly, is causing chaos in America because farmers there have started growing it for fuel rather than food, and they cannot now get maize to feed their cattle. Their production system is going bananas.

We could have that other word, which is not mentioned in the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment — nuclear. It is odd that France and England have decided to increase their nuclear capability, with France building five extra nuclear power stations. It must be a case of saying that because the interconnector is coming to us, North and South, we will be alright. The island of Ireland will not have to worry because we can get nuclear-generated electricity while pretending that we have nothing to do with nuclear power.

However, there are knock-on effects from each of those things. To meet the targets and the recommendations for wind power, we would probably have to cover great swathes of the country with windmills. One can imagine people flying in from America to see the

beautiful Northern Ireland landscape — the Giant's Causeway, and so on — and being greeted by wall-to-wall windmills. Is it proposed that the glens of Antrim should be flooded to produce hydropower?

I understand that a report from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has found that biofuels are just as bad for the climate as fossil fuels. That is reminiscent of the margarine-or-butter debate — we stopped using one and started to use the other until another report stated that both were as bad as each other. If the nuclear option is adopted, live material is buried for millennia in Welsh caves, and so on. There is much confusion and many problems in respect of this matter.

As Simon Hamilton said, even if we could generate the extra electricity, there would be mega drama because the grid could not cope with it. Furthermore, such a scheme would require a major amount of money, and the Minister would require lots of planning permission. One only has to note the drama in Armagh, where attempts were made to put a few kilometres of wire in and the entire world was up in arms. It is fine to have targets, but mega problems arise in making those a reality.

Oil prices have gone up — I recently paid £500 for 900 litres of fuel oil. That affects people on the ground. Therefore, there is a social aspect to this issue. Why have oil prices gone up? Is it because of OPEC, is there a refining problem, or have the price increases been socially engineered to force us to deal with climate change?

Mr B Wilson: I disagree with most of the views expressed by the Member who has just spoken. However, I welcome this debate and the opportunity to highlight the potential benefits that renewable energy can bring to Northern Ireland, including protection of our environment, job creation, and helping us to meet the target of eliminating fuel poverty by 2016.

As Mr Ford pointed out, Northern Ireland has a vast potential for producing electricity from renewable sources, particularly wind, tides and biomass. Despite that, Northern Ireland is bottom of the relevant European league table, with a mere 1.2% of our electricity being produced from renewable sources. Figures from the UK Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform show that the average wind farm can produce electricity at a cost of 3p to 6p per unit. Why, then, should householders here pay an NIE tariff of 11p per unit for electricity? That must change.

Oil and gas prices are rising rapidly so we must start to invest in alternatives. Otherwise, fuel poverty will increase, rather than be eradicated. Last September, the price of oil was 35p a litre; it is now 55p a litre — a rise of over 50% in under a year. That rise is set to continue because peak oil production has passed and the worldwide demand for oil is increasing rapidly.

Wood-pellet boilers can provide home heating at half the cost of oil or gas. For example, wood-pellet

boilers installed by the Housing Executive in Clough heat a three-bedroom house at an average cost of £9 a week. That is compared with neighbours in that area who pay £25 a week for oil. I am pleased that the Housing Executive has proposed to introduce schemes that will fit wood-pellet boilers in 30 more houses. I urge the Minister for Social Development to stop installing oil and gas boilers in social housing under the warm homes scheme and the Housing Executive's heating replacement scheme. Wood-pellet boilers should be installed instead; there is not much difference in the respective costs of installation.

6.15 pm

I congratulate the Executive on the installation of more than 2,000 solar panels since August 2006. That project cost £5.2 million and was funded through the environment and renewable energy fund. Unfortunately, that funding ended in March, and, therefore, the installation of solar panels in social housing also ended. However, £17 million from the environment and renewable energy fund's energy from waste scheme remains unspent. That is not even a form of renewable energy, because it encourages the production of waste.

That money would be better spent installing solar panels on Housing Executive properties to reduce fuel poverty. The ending of the environment and renewable energy fund and the decision of the Minister of Finance to end the Reconnect grants and to remove the renewables obligation from the building regulations threaten to kill Northern Ireland's renewable-energy industry, which employs 1,400 people and which could create up to 5,500 new jobs.

There is not the political will in the Executive to match Northern Ireland's great potential for the expansion of renewable energy, nor is there sufficient co-operation between Departments to make the necessary changes. The Environment Minister announces that we must reduce CO₂ emissions by 50% by 2050, while the Minister with responsibility for energy abolishes the Reconnect grants and the renewable energy fund. The Minister for Social Development adopts the code for sustainable homes at level 3, with a commitment to zero-carbon homes by 2016, while the Minister of Finance removes the renewables obligation from the building regulations. The Programme for Government states the intention to promote local entrepreneurship and to create sustainable jobs, while, collectively, the Executive threaten to strangle at birth the indigenous renewable-energy industry.

Northern Ireland could lead the rest of the UK and Ireland in renewable-energy production and help to reduce fuel poverty. We have the abilities and the knowledge to be a green light to others. I urge the House to support the motion and the amendment.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): It is fortuitous that I respond to the motion, as many of the issues raised apply to my Department as much as to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

We have heard how the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment completed, in December 2007, a review of the sustainable-energy market in Northern Ireland in order to inform policy development on the issue. That review examined the market position and, among other things, assessed the options available to meet DETI's 1% energy-efficiency target, the renewable-energy-consumption target of 12% by 2012 and other challenging targets arising from the implementation of the energy end-use efficiency and energy services directive. The review examined all sectors of the sustainable-energy market: domestic, industrial, commercial, the voluntary/community sector and public sectors. It looked at large- and small-scale renewables and energy efficiency.

In several areas, the review identified new options for consideration in the light of increased public engagement in climate-change issues: the strength of arguments presented in analyses such as the Stern Review, to which Mr Ford referred; the emergence of corporate response to climate change; and UK-wide commitments to renewable energy and greenhouse-gas emissions. A key element in the review was the identification of gaps and barriers to the sustainable-energy marketplace and to identify actions to address those gaps and barriers in future.

To that end, the review generated recommendations that cut across the responsibilities of several Departments, as well as measures that DETI can implement immediately. Mr Ford spoke about joined-up Government: just because some of us are in Government does not mean that we do not recognise the need for work to be done in such areas. He probably knows that I wrote to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, suggesting that it needed to form a subcommittee on sustainable development. That is important if we are to progress on the issues that he identified. He also —

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Minister's reference to my comment. What is the position with regard to the subcommittee on sustainable development?

The Minister of the Environment: I have yet to receive a response from the junior Ministers, but I will let the Member know when it arrives.

Mr Ford also referred to jobs. He is aware that quite a few jobs were created by the SeaGen marine current turbine, and he knows that Invest NI is working to provide more jobs in the energy sector.

Mr Cree spoke of the need to raise the target from 12%. He knows that, under the European directive, there is a need to move to 15%, which, I am sure, he will welcome.

Jim Shannon welcomed the work of bodies such as the Energy Savings Trust and offered his support for a coherent joined-up message. That was very much a theme of the debate.

On the behalf of the DETI Minister, I acknowledge the work of sustainable-energy bodies such as the Energy Savings Trust, Action Renewables, the Carbon Trust and the Northern Ireland Energy Agency. I agree that a joined-up approach is essential, and I know that DETI is leading cross-departmental work on that issue. That Department has been speaking to my officials about many of those matters.

It should be stressed that the recommendations of the review represent only the first step. Minister Dodds has reviewed the recommendations and was pleased to note that the review recognised the dedication and expertise of all the organisations involved in the Northern Ireland sustainable-energy market. He was also pleased to see that Northern Ireland, on the whole, benchmarks well against not only other UK regions, but the regions of Europe that were used as comparators for the purpose of the review.

However, it is important to note that opportunities exist to learn from some of the activities undertaken by some of the comparator regions. DETI officials are evaluating the review's recommendations, many of which require more detailed work — on issues such as cost and economic viability — before any decisions are made on which of the recommendations will be implemented. Many of the recommendations are cross-cutting, and relevant work is ongoing among officials from various Departments.

We are all aware — perhaps with the exception of Mr McFarland — of the need to act now to minimise of the amount of energy that is used in Northern Ireland and to minimise harmful emissions to help to protect the environment. No one can deny that our climate is changing, both globally and on a local scale.

I recognise the comments that were made by Mr McFarland about other countries. However, that does not mean that we do not need to do something about our climate-change commitments in this country. We need to get on with the game.

Mindful of that, DETI and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in the Republic of Ireland have carried out a study, which is referred to in the SDLP amendment. That study addresses how additional generation from renewable sources could be accommodated within the electricity grid. Results show that, although that is technically feasible, to accommodate a significant increase in renewable-energy generation, a significant investment in the electrical grid infrastructure would be required. Mr Hamilton mentioned the ability of the Northern Ireland electrical grid to transmit up to 42% renewable

energy. A balance must be struck between improving the sustainability and security of our energy supply and — I can say this with my environment hat on — the protection of the environment.

Members will know that consultation on draft PPS 18 has just closed. That document deals with the criteria for renewable energy, and it has been welcomed by the wind-energy industry. It may be serendipity, but I held a meeting today with wind-energy industry representatives, and we had a good discussion about what action is needed to meet the targets on renewable energy.

Securing our future energy supply is high on the Government's agenda as we seek to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. It is vital that we deliver a more cohesive and joined-up solution. To that end, discussions have taken place between DETI and DOE officials, but I recognise that there is still much to do.

Work has been carried out to promote wind energy — which is probably the most commercial and viable renewable technology that is available. However, there are other sources of energy such as marine-current turbines and — as the proposer of the motion mentioned — biofuels. I was going to be a little mischievous and commit the DETI Minister to nuclear energy. However, I think that that would be a bit much, standing in his place.

Wind is the most naturally available source of renewable energy in Northern Ireland, but it is also important to encourage the growth of non-wind renewables. The co-ordinated approach that is available should be grasped, and that will enable Northern Ireland to optimise the potential benefits across the energy, agriculture, enterprise, transport and environmental sectors, while contributing to renewable-energy targets and the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions.

The proposer of the motion, and Martina Anderson a Member for Foyle — during a lengthy intervention — mentioned fuel poverty.

They will both know that DETI has no role in determining energy prices, but it strives at all times to create market conditions that, over the long term, will drive prices down. DETI is only too aware of the recent increases in world energy costs — global gas prices this summer are expected to be 100% higher than in the same period last year. Minister Dodds and his officials are conscious of the impact that increases have on the business community and on those who were mentioned by Jennifer McCann and the Member for Foyle Ms Anderson — the fuel poor.

With that in mind, DETI has sought over recent years to reduce the burden of energy costs on low-income families through the introduction of a new single wholesale electricity market; the mutualisation of energy assets, such as the Moyle electricity interconnector; the Scotland to Northern Ireland gas

pipeline; the Phoenix Natural Gas transmission business; and the use of a £5.6 million grant to defray the 2007-08 energy efficiency level, which reduced the electricity tariffs to 1% below what they otherwise would have been.

DETI officials have also been involved in the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which is chaired by Minister Ritchie. I understand that she will announce her plans on fuel poverty very soon.

Ministers are keen to identify the best energy solutions for Northern Ireland in relation to sustainable energy, and to encourage us to become an exemplar for sustainable energy. It is important that all our future activities address gaps and barriers, as highlighted in the review. I hope that I have addressed some of the comments that were made in the debate, and I will inform Minister Dodds of any concerns that I have been unable to address.

Mr A Maginness: I think that peace has broken out in the Assembly after the rougher debates that took place earlier today.

Mr Cree: Will it be sustainable?

Mr A Maginness: It will be sustained in the Assembly for at least another hour or two. I am grateful to all parties for supporting the important amendment. As the Minister said, the amendment draws attention to the study that seeks to achieve an all-Ireland target of roughly 40% renewable energy in the production of electricity. That is important.

The Minister, succinctly, drew our attention to the fact that we are rich in the natural resources — such as wind, biomass and tidal power — that are required to generate renewable energy, and it is important to emphasise that.

There was almost unanimity in the Chamber, apart from Mr McFarland, who raised the N-word — the nuclear option. Perhaps his interest comes from his military background; I am not sure. He also tried to incite Daithí McKay by threatening to flood the glens. Nevertheless, most Members sang from the same hymn sheet and are genuinely committed to the development of renewable energy. It is imperative that we be so. We cannot sustain further dramatic and drastic price rises, which overburden the most vulnerable in our society and which will, ultimately, overburden the institutions. It is essential that we invest wisely in renewable energy.

I have one note of caution on biofuels. Mr Simon Hamilton referred to the problem with biofuels, and the World Bank stated recently that biofuels have contributed substantially to an 80% price increase in food throughout the world. That will have devastating consequences for tens of millions of people who live in the developing world. In addition, the European

Environment Agency has called for the European Union to suspend its 10% target for biofuel use until more comprehensive scientific work has been done to assess their risks.

Therefore, problems with the use of biofuels arise not only because they inflate the cost of food, but because more scientific knowledge needs to be gathered and because of the impact that they have on the environment. It is important that that is taken into consideration.

6.30 pm

It is also important that we express concerns about the renewable transport fuel obligation, which demands that petrol retailers mix 2.5% biofuel into the petrol that they sell to motorists. The obligation also demands that that amount rise to 5.75% by 2010. Such a policy simply encourages the unrestrained use and production of biofuels, which could — although I am not saying that it absolutely will — have a negative impact on our economy and our environment. That is a word of warning.

We are united in our efforts to get Departments to work together, and the Minister emphasised that attempts are being made to do that. Mr Ford also emphasised the importance of such work, as did Jennifer McCann. It is important that the Government make a united effort to bring about a revolution in the use of renewable energy in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all the Members who participated in the debate. I hope that the motion and the amendment will put the spotlight on sustainable energy and fuel poverty, which are important matters. The motion calls for:

“closer co-operation between different departments to ensure that sustainable energy, including renewable energy, is developed in such a way that benefits the environment”.

At this stage in our history, we have the opportunity to make a difference.

The Assembly should show leadership in promoting initiatives that will benefit the environment. For too long, there has been no forward or joined-up thinking about sustainable energy. We must change that — we need to get it right for the sake of our future and that of our children, because they are the ones who will suffer.

Some organisations have done a great deal of good work on energy issues, and they have raised the profile of the matter at many levels. For example, the NI Energy Agency is a one-stop-shop-style organisation that is charged with the implementation of policy in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency and low-carbon transport advice. Those matters could and should be explored in greater detail. Such a body could act as a conduit for the many different Departments that are responsible for energy issues.

There is a great deal of confusion about the functions that each Department carries out on sustainable energy. We must change that situation and implement proper policies to ensure that that confusion no longer exists. Our party colleague Bairbre de Brún has raised the issue of sustainable energy in relation to the EU task force, and she also discussed it during her recent visit to Washington.

Jennifer McCann opened the debate eloquently — Martina Anderson tried to steal her thunder halfway through her speech, but Jennifer managed to get it back, so I congratulate Jennifer for that. Tommy Gallagher spoke on the amendment, and he made the point that investment must be made in the single electricity market in order to benefit all our futures. He also discussed planning issues for wind farms, and he mentioned how some planning applications for wind farms can take up to two years or sometimes longer to be processed. That is an important issue, and I am glad that the Minister of the Environment is here to listen to those concerns, as I am sure that she shares them.

Jim Shannon spoke about the Strangford turbine that has been installed. There has been a great deal of publicity about that, and it was important that it was raised. I hope that that scheme will prove to be a model for good practice.

Jim also spoke about energy-saving light bulbs, which can make a massive difference. It does not take much for us to get our heads round that. Again, that is an issue of awareness.

Leslie Cree talked about the targets for sustainable energy not being serious enough, and the need to be more adventurous. It was said that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment realises that, so, hopefully, the targets will be much more challenging in the future.

David Ford talked about the huge environmental issues that have to be tackled, which is why the motion refers to closer co-operation between different Departments. I hope that that closer co-operation will enable the issues to be addressed at a higher level.

George Robinson spoke about new technologies and how he hoped that they could be developed in East Derry. Some Members may argue for the development of such technologies in their own constituencies, so we may not agree on that issue. Francie Brolly may have something to say about that during the Adjournment debate.

Daithí McKay spoke about the need for the Executive to show leadership, which is exactly what the public want. They want politicians to show leadership and take responsibility for the issue. It is too important an issue not to do so.

Simon Hamilton referred to Members having their own sustainable energy. If someone were to bottle the hot air that is produced in the Chamber, enough energy

may be generated to power a small city. Perhaps we should consider that.

Alan McFarland talked about the American Government refusing to sign up to some environmental treaties. That is nothing new; they do their own thing without respecting the wishes of other people. That is an issue that the American Government need to take on board. Alan went on to mention, as did others, the nuclear option. I do not want a nuclear plant in West Belfast, or, indeed, on the island of Ireland. Perhaps Alan wants one in his constituency of North Down. That is an issue that he can raise another time.

Brian Wilson mentioned the worldwide demand for oil, which is increasing. He urged the Minister for Social Development to promote the installation of wood-pellet boilers instead of oil boilers in social housing. In recent weeks, many members of the public have talked about the increases in prices of fuel, which is related to the fuel-poverty issue. I hope that some of the Departments will take Mr Wilson's comments on board.

Minister Foster, although responding in place of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, said that many of the issues that were raised concerned her Department. Therefore, it was good that she was present for the debate, and she has assured the House that she will raise with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the issues that relate to his Department.

Alban Maginness, rightly, said that the amendment adds to the motion and that it was important that all parties support the motion and the amendment.

In West Belfast and other areas throughout the North, families face massive socio-economic problems in which fuel poverty plays a part. Such problems have to be tackled. We recently heard from the chief executive of the Authority for Energy Regulation, Iain Osborne, about ever-increasing energy prices. People on low incomes have many reasons to be concerned after the regulator published his most recent report.

Recently, many of my constituents have raised their concerns about fuel poverty. More and more of them are falling into the bracket that classes them as suffering because of fuel poverty. The Assembly must do all that it can to reverse that trend. In this day and age, if one family cannot afford to heat their home, that is one family too many.

Fuel poverty is an indictment on the society that we live in today. It is also an indictment on the direct rule Ministers, who, for many years, did not recognise the issue, and did absolutely nothing about it or about sustainable energy.

I hope that, with the motion and the amendment being passed today, the Ministers take the issue on board and that we move into the future in a more positive manner. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the recommendations in the review of the Sustainable Energy Market; further notes the findings of the All-Island Grid Study in respect of investment and planning needed to allow the electricity grid to transmit up to 42% renewable electricity; and calls on the Executive to ensure that there is closer co-operation between different Departments to ensure that sustainable energy, including renewable energy, is developed in such a way that benefits the environment, and tackles the socio-economic problems that face families due to fuel poverty.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker.*]

ADJOURNMENT

Waste Management in East Derry/ Londonderry

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that my speech will not last for 15 minutes.

This debate concerns the small townland of Ringsend, near Garvagh. For those who do not know the area, it is along the Coleraine to Limavady road. It is a very pleasant, quiet, rural, forested area with a beautiful view of Lough Foyle and the Donegal Hills as one travels towards Limavady along the Craigmores Road.

That is a very picturesque and popular residential area, and I wish to highlight the very real possibility of the proliferation of landfill sites there. Proposed landfill sites are too close together — of the four potential sites, the two that are the furthest apart have a distance between them of just three and a half miles. Some of those sites clearly contravene the proximity principle for waste management.

The largest proposed site is on the Cam Road. That is the site that is preferred by the North West Region Waste Management Group, and it will serve seven of the current council areas. Planning permission is very likely to be granted for that site.

The second proposed site is on the Craigmores Road. That site was a former landfill facility that was privately owned but was leased for use by Coleraine Borough Council. That site has a bad history, because the original proprietor got into trouble with the law in respect of how the site was run. The site has now been properly refurbished, and it is due to open soon. It will be licensed for certain types of waste and it will incorporate a recycling facility.

The third site is being applied for by a private developer. It is on the Belraugh Road, which is between the Ringsend Road and the Dungiven Road. The site will be used mainly for the dumping of building waste. That should not give rise to the normal worries that are associated with landfill sites, where all types of waste are present.

The fourth possible site is on the Letterloan Road. That is a more remote possibility, but it is worth mentioning

because of concerns about the cumulative effect of four adjacent sites. The people of the area would like to forestall those plans by being forewarned. The Letterloan Road site has been mooted as a possible site for mechanical biological treatment. That is a real possibility because the North West Region Waste Management Group is actively considering the development of such a plant.

If those sites were developed, they would be kept very busy. They would serve a large area of the north-west. They are very close together, and would be accessed via the small rural roads of the area. That leads to consequent concerns about traffic volume, site control, smell and leachates; not to mention the possible drop in the value of residences there, and the devaluing of the area's residential popularity.

Although we accept that modern landfill sites are much better constructed and much better controlled, the concern is that the cumulative effect of even well-controlled sites will be excessive. The residents have good reason to be concerned.

A local residents' committee is organising resistance to that possibility. Nobody wants a landfill site, and the people of Ballerin certainly do not want four of them.

6.45 pm

The residents' committee made a presentation to Coleraine Borough Council. A Sinn Féin proposal to approach the environmental health service and to write to the Minister was agreed by the council. Councillor Billy Leonard, who made that proposal, also raised the issue with Bairbre de Brún, and that is being developed. A petition will be taken to Europe on the question of proliferation. It is hoped that Bairbre de Brún, a Member of the European Parliament, will meet the residents' committee.

I am simply expressing the concerns of the people of Ballerin. I hope that something can be done on their behalf to forestall the landfill sites that would completely change the face of such a beautiful rural area. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McQuillan: I agree with much of what Mr Brolly said, but I do not recall Councillor Leonard proposing anything at the council meeting; perhaps that slipped past me. However, that is a story for another day.

I will refer to the same region that Mr Brolly mentioned — the Ringsend/Ballerin area — and go into the background of some of the dumps in that area. I hope that you will bear with me, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The waste management plan, which has been agreed by all seven councils in the North West Region Waste Management Group, identified the need for a regional landfill site to cater for the future needs of the area. Only two of the councils — Coleraine and Magherafelt

— have landfill sites operating currently and the capacity in those sites is limited.

Through an EU procurement exercise, expressions of interest in providing a landfill facility in the region were solicited. The results of that exercise identified the site at the Cam quarry as the preferred option, and that was agreed by each individual council in the group. That is the only landfill possibility that the North West Region Waste Management Group has an interest in pursuing, and the owners of the site are preparing an application for planning.

The waste management plan identified the now closed landfill site at Letterloan Road, Macosquin, which was operated by Coleraine Borough Council, as one of a number of:

“Potential locations for the development of an MBT study, under the ownership/control of Councils”.

To date, no action has been taken with regard to those potential sites. Mechanical biological treatment is not a landfill operation: waste is taken to an enclosed space and suitable materials are separated for recycling. The remainder of the waste undergoes heat treatment to produce pellets for possible use in commercial boilers.

A site at Craigmore Road, Garvagh, exists with planning permission for landfill. Work is being carried out on the site to comply with the conditions necessary for the Department of the Environment to grant a permit to allow the facility to be used. The site has a long history of extremely poor operational conditions under the former owner, who served a prison sentence for operating the site illegally.

There is a substantial objection from local residents to that site being allowed to operate, and they are calling to have all illegally deposited waste removed. If that were agreed, it would go a long way to restore some confidence in the system.

An application for a site at Belraugh Road, Macosquin, to take inert waste — clay, rubble and such like — has been lodged with the Planning Service and as yet no determination has been made. If that site were to be granted permission to go ahead, it would be a disgrace, as it is a lovely green valley.

The North West Region Waste Management Group has no interest in either the site at Craigmore Road or the site at Belraugh Road. The proposal for the Cam quarry would reinstate an old quarry rather develop a greenfield site, as would happen for the proposals at the Craigmore Road and the Belraugh Road sites. The Minister will recall that I accompanied the residents when they met her. We had a forthright meeting at which the residents put their views to the Minister, and at which she outlined her views. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr McClarty: Before I begin, I apologise to the House and to the Minister for being unable to remain for her response; I look forward to reading it tomorrow in Hansard. Unfortunately, I had to be in another place 20 minutes ago.

I will not go over what was said about the Ringsend and Ballerin area. There has been much debate in the Coleraine Borough Council chamber, and much has been said tonight. It is an area of beauty, and many of its residents have deep concerns about the use of the land, and its misuse in the past, as was mentioned by Mr Brolly. I hope that the Minister will consider those concerns.

Regarding the general issue of waste in East Londonderry, Northern Ireland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, has, for many years, been almost totally reliant on landfill for the disposal of its waste. The EU landfill directive, which came into force in 1999, set binding targets that restricted the amount of household waste that can be disposed of in landfill sites. Furthermore, the directive required member states to draw up plans to reduce the amount of other waste materials being disposed of in that way. Those states, therefore, have had to reassess their waste management practices, and to consider alternatives, such as increasing recycling and recovery levels.

Northern Ireland has tackled the issue of waste management in a very positive manner. Following widespread consultation with key stakeholder groups, we were the first part of the United Kingdom to develop a waste-management strategy, setting out a vision of Northern Ireland as a centre of excellence in resource and waste management.

The north-west region waste management plan, which has been agreed by seven councils, has identified the need for a regional landfill site to cater for the area's future needs. However, as Mr McQuillan stated, only two of those councils have landfill sites currently in operation, namely Coleraine and Magherafelt, and capacity in those two sites is limited. In the waste management plan the — now closed — landfill site at Letterloan Road, Macosquin, which was operated by Coleraine Borough Council, is identified as one of several potential locations for the development of a mechanical biological treatment (MBT) study, under the ownership/control of councils.

I will briefly mention the importance of waste prevention in any waste management strategy for East Londonderry. That should be high on the agenda, and a key priority for waste management. Waste prevention includes all activities that reduce the amount of waste entering the collected waste stream — for example, avoiding waste generation; reducing the quantity and hazardous nature of waste at source; and re-using products before they enter the waste stream.

The pressure on global resources is a major challenge for Governments throughout the developed world, and was a key topic in the European Commission's sixth Environment Action Programme. The thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste strongly emphasises the increasing importance of waste-prevention measures in strategic waste planning. The landfill directive places stringent targets on the diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill. Northern Ireland produces some 1 million tons of municipal waste annually, and that figure grew by 2.5% between 2003 and 2004. If the current rate continues, municipal waste arisings will increase by almost 50% by 2020, producing a significant gap between arisings and the amount we are permitted to dispose of in landfill. Waste prevention will help us to meet our targets by reducing the amount of residual waste requiring recycling and recovery.

Now that devolution has been restored to Northern Ireland, these are the problems that a functioning Executive can — and should — tackle head on. More specifically, I return to Ringsend and Ballerin, and I trust that the Minister will have ideas with which to tackle that particular issue.

Mr Dallat: I thank Francie Brolly for bringing the motion before the Assembly, and I express genuine thanks to the Minister for being here to take note and to respond. I attended a public meeting in Ballerin last Thursday night. I have known the people of that area for my whole life; they are the quietest, most inoffensive people one could meet, but they were very angry — almost hostile — at that meeting.

Perhaps no one could have envisaged what has happened here; that there are four potential sites. I agree with those Members who said that that is the nub of the problem.

I am pleased that Bairbre de Brún is now involved — I had to think for a moment who that was. The difficulty arose in the first place because of the nasty and horrendous history of what can only be called a dump on Craigmore Road. Coleraine Borough Council officers were slow to take appropriate action to stop it. I am not claiming that the Minister is responsible for history. She is not; the system was woeful.

On occasions I followed lorries and used my mobile phone to alert people about what was happening, only to be told that I had to stop because I was trespassing on private property. The site has been inherited by the Environment and Heritage Service, of which I must be extremely critical.

The Minister knows that in recent times there has been a policy to remove waste and return it to its source. It was decided at that time to cap up to, perhaps, 300,000 tons of toxic material. We have pictures to prove that some of the waste came from hospitals.

That is when the anger really began. Then, as Adrian McQuillan mentioned, there was another site on the Belraugh Road — an area that I would describe as one of outstanding natural beauty. To his credit, the present owner carried out a massive planting scheme on it 20 years ago and it is now home to a colony of wild animals. The site looks down on a beautiful plain. The last thing that anyone would dream of would be to use it to as a landfill dump, even for inert material.

As for the site that the North West Region Waste Management Group has chosen, I can now see a distinct disadvantage in joining such a group. If a site is proposed in one of the council areas, the other five councils will accept it, leaving the one pretty powerless to do anything about the decision. The fact that probably all political parties were involved in choosing a hole in the earth as a dump on our site means that there is no political capital to be made.

Anyway, people in that community are utterly devastated. One of the leaders called me today to suggest blocking roads, but I said such action was outside the law and reminded the caller of the example of the Parades Commission. We need to work with people.

However, at the moment the community envisage an area akin to East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is a tough task for the Minister, but one that we depend on her to undertake. I know that she has not yet met the group and I plead with her, on bended knee if necessary, to do so. Initially, we had every confidence that she would.

The Minister answered a question for me today on human rights and how they relate to the clustering of landfill sites. However, while her answer addresses the theory, I do not think that it will go down terribly well with residents.

Like David McClarty, I have a train to catch to Dublin, but I am so interested in this that I will try not to break the speed limit on my way to the station. I look forward to the Minister's response.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I was a bit worried there, when the Member was getting down on bended knee, but I think that I am safe enough.

I thank Francie Brolly for raising this very important issue and for the opportunity to discuss wider waste management issues in his constituency. I would also like to thank colleagues who represent the north-west for their useful contributions to the debate.

7.00 pm

Waste management is one of the many challenges facing Northern Ireland, and we must work together for a more sustainable future. The previous debate was on sustainable energy. Although EU landfill targets keep me focused on the big picture, I am also aware that, as with all other matters, local issues are just as important.

The debate is a timely reminder that protecting the environment is everyone's concern in one way or another.

I want to take a few moments to highlight the steps that are being taken to ensure that the waste management strategy for Northern Ireland, which was launched in 2006, will be implemented. That strategy is set in the context of the sustainable development policy, and its key aim is to help us to manage waste and resources effectively. That means using resources in a way that reduces the quantities of waste produced, which relates to Mr McClarty's point about reducing waste, and, where waste is generated, to manage it in a way that minimises its impact on the environment and on public health.

When taken together with the other key policy instruments, the waste management strategy provides a framework for the development of a new integrated network of waste-treatment facilities that will not only ensure that EU targets for diverting waste from landfill are met, but will, with regard to sustainability and resource efficiency, increase recycling levels. Although there will be many hurdles to overcome on the way, perhaps the greatest challenge facing Northern Ireland is that it is driven by stringent European and national targets to reduce significantly the amount of waste that is sent to landfill before the first key landfill-reduction target date, which is approaching fast in 2010. I know that that you are aware of that, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Many Members will be aware that the £200 million strategic waste infrastructure fund, which I have worked hard to secure, has been allocated by the Executive to support local government in diverting waste from landfill and increase recycling and recovery. Not only will that enable Northern Ireland to comply with its EU obligations — thereby avoiding substantial fines — it will also create new construction, engineering and waste-management jobs.

The central Government contribution to the strategic waste infrastructure investment represents up to around 50% of the total investment required, with remaining capital investment being provided through local government and local authorities. In particular, the three regional district-council waste-management partnerships have a vital role to play in implementing the strategy and establishing the waste facilities required to deal with waste in a more sustainable way.

The north-west regional waste management group has been working closely with the Department to finalise proposals to identify the type and nature of facilities that are needed for that particular area and to progress the procurement process. Earlier, I mentioned the importance of dealing with local issues. Francie Brolly mentioned residents' concerns in the Ringsend area of East Londonderry about applications for landfill sites in the area. I appreciate those concerns, particularly since the impression may have been given that there

would be uncontrolled development of such facilities that would, as a result, have a negative impact on residents.

I assure Mr Brolly and, indeed, other Members such as Mr Dallat, that only after extensive consideration and a public-procurement exercise has the north-west group decided that provision of a local landfill facility should be located on the Cam Road at Ringsend, and that it is the only site in the area that the councils that comprise the group are interested to see progressed through planning.

The Craigmore site was licensed, as has been acknowledged, by Coleraine District Council in 1996. Planning permission was already in place for its use as a landfill site since the mid-1970s. In November 2006, my Department granted planning permission for engineering works at the site. Two further planning applications are with the Department. One is for a closure plan for the site and the other is for a waste-transfer and material-recover facility. Both are under consideration.

The Department will consider every suggestion it receives with regard to those issues. I acknowledge residents' concerns. Indeed, Mr Dallat may remember that he arranged a meeting between some of those residents and me, at which we discussed their concerns. I am quite happy to continue to take evidence from them on those issues.

I note that Mr Brolly talked about a petition for proliferation. I must say that that is rather premature given the fact that the Department has considered only one of those applications. I recognise that there are four, but an application does not mean a determination. I want to make that clear.

Therefore, the strategic and regional approach to developing facilities is precisely what the strategy and the Department have advocated. I congratulate the group on the way that it has conducted business in that regard and for its plans to hold sessions at which representatives from interested parties can be present. Undoubtedly, people will attend those meetings to find about proposed landfill sites and, indeed, to make comments.

I emphasise that any applications for a regional waste facility must be considered against regional waste-management plans provided by the three regional groups; the waste strategy's aims; and local residents' needs and concerns. As the Minister responsible for planning, those issues are important to me. I reassure Members that I will take them into account.

Adjourned at 7.05 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 19 May 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

Death of Robert Dunlop

Mr Speaker: Mr Ian Paisley Jnr has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria that are set out in Standing Order 23A. I shall call him to speak for up to three minutes. I shall then call a Member from each of the other parties, as agreed with Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak. There will be no opportunity for interventions, for questions or for a vote on the matter. I shall not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Paisley Jnr: It is with great sadness that I bring to the attention of the House the tragic death of Robert Dunlop, whose name needs no introduction to the House or to Members. He was a legend in the sport of motorcycle racing, a true Ulsterman, a dedicated father and a dedicated husband. Some Members knew Robert Dunlop personally, and he was known internationally for his sporting prowess. As Members know, he tragically lost his life last Thursday evening, 15 May, in a practice run for the North West 200. His remains were laid to rest yesterday in Garryduff Presbyterian Church graveyard.

At the DUP party officers' meeting this morning, we chose "God's mercy endureth for ever" as our scripture reading. Without doubt, we can say to Robert's family that God's mercy will endure for them at this time of great and tragic grief and heartache. To Louise, Robert's wife; to his three great sons, William, Daniel and Michael; and to his twin sister, his other sisters, his brother Jim and his mother, May, the House can say truly that God's mercy will endure for them for ever in this lonely and dark valley.

To his tens of thousands of motorcycle-racing fans, of which I was one, as were many other Members, the sport has lost a superstar, legend and true hero.

Robert Dunlop was a man who carried the scars of motorcycle racing without complaint, and who conquered adversity and let his racing do the talking — he was the essence of a true champion. Indeed, his many wins at the North West 200 are unsurpassed. His international wins in Macau and on the Isle of Man tell their own stories and mark him out as a true champion.

I hope today that this House can truly rejoice in the wonderful memories that we have of Robert and say to his family and friends that his legend will endure for ever.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McKay: I echo the Member's comments, and, following the loss of one of motorcycling's great heroes, I express Sinn Féin's condolences to the Dunlop family. Robert Dunlop will be sorely missed, not only by people in Ballymoney and north Antrim but by the millions of people throughout the world who watched him race.

At yesterday's service, the minister outlined how Robert was a great hero not only because of his sporting ability but because of the type of person that he was. Like Joey, Robert was an ordinary person — one of the lads — and that is why people loved him so much. He was a legend and a hero, and he will be sorely missed.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I join my colleagues in expressing my and my party's deep sadness at the untimely death of Robert Dunlop, which is a great loss not just to north Antrim but to the whole of Northern Ireland and, particularly, to the sport of motorcycle road racing.

Although we all have fond memories of Robert and his elder brother Joey — who died eight years ago — we must remember that, first and foremost, Robert was a husband and father. I appeal to the entire community in the Province to pray for Robert's immediate family, his wider family circle and his friends.

Over the years, we have lost many great bike riders — including the two Dunlop brothers. The sport that many enjoy watching and participating in can also be cruel in the way in which it takes from us our iconic aces and gives to us the loss of the brightest and best.

Robert will be remembered as one of the great legends of Ulster road racing, and his determination to overcome the injuries he sustained in a horrific crash in the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy in 1994 is an inspiration to people of all ages. His courage in recovering from those terrible injuries in order to return to the sport that he loved so much and his brave decision to continue racing after his brother Joey was killed in a racing accident in Estonia in 2000 must also be admired.

Perhaps, the most fitting tribute and memorial to Robert — which we can all share in and pledge to do

— would be to exercise care every time we take our ordinary bikes and cars on the road.

Finally, I am sure that the Northern Ireland public will wish to erect an appropriate memorial to the two Dunlop brothers. The Province should be proud of those sons of Ulster and remember with fondness and gratitude their immense contribution to the sport of motorcycle racing.

Mr O’Loan: On behalf of the SDLP, I wish to be associated with all that has been said in tribute to Robert Dunlop, and I express my sympathy to his wife, Louise, their sons and the entire family, who are so shocked at this time. Robert’s death is all the more poignant, following as it does that of his brother Joey. They were similarly young at the time of their deaths.

The courage of bike riders — especially those who participate in road racing — is great.

Only last Monday, I attended an event in Armoy with fellow North Antrim Members Mervyn Storey and Ian Paisley Jnr to commemorate the Armoy Armada — four great riders from the past, including Joey Dunlop. Three of those riders are no longer with us.

The other most distinguishing marks of Robert Dunlop’s character were his modesty and total lack of pretension. Like many of our great sportspeople, he carried his greatness lightly — he was at ease with other riders and supporters. I hope that his family will derive some support from the many tributes that, properly, have been paid to Robert from around the world.

Mr Neeson: The news of Robert Dunlop’s death was a big shock not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the world. Robert was totally dedicated to motorsport and, along with his brother Joey, was a great ambassador for Northern Ireland over the years. Robert’s popularity and support were shown by the huge numbers that attended his funeral yesterday. The Alliance Party expresses its deepest sympathies to his wife Louise, his sons, his mother May and the rest of the family.

Ms Purvis: I join all my Assembly colleagues and members of the Progressive Unionist Party in expressing sincere sympathy to the Dunlop family. Robert was a great talent in motorsport and man of immense courage and strength — an inspiration to many. Robert’s talent is evident in his sons, and I hope and pray that his family gain courage and strength from the many messages and tributes that have been paid to him.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Libraries Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that, under Standing Order 35(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any amendments tabled to that Bill. As no amendments have been tabled, there will be no opportunity today to discuss the Libraries Bill. However, Members will be able to have a full debate during the Bill’s Final Stage.

The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Libraries Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose, and 15 minutes for a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

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

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (27/07/08R) on its Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm; and calls on the Executive to bring forward, before the summer recess, a timeframe for implementing the recommendations in the report.

The report of the inquiry into the prevention of suicide and self harm is the first of its kind to be debated in the Assembly since restoration last May. It is the culmination of an extensive investigation by the Health Committee, and it deals with a very serious and sensitive subject. There is probably no one taking part in the debate, or listening to it, who has not been affected by suicide, either in their own family circle or in their local community. Therefore, I am grateful to the Speaker for allowing some extra time to open the debate and to make the winding-up speech on such an important subject.

The Committee found that, each year in Northern Ireland, an average of 195 people of all ages and from all backgrounds and parts of the Province take their own lives. Each year, a further 4,500 people are admitted to hospital after attempting suicide or inflicting serious injury through self-harm.

12.15 pm

The actual number of suicides may be greater, because families are often reluctant to have suicide recorded as the cause of death, due to concerns over the associated stigma.

There is no single reason that leads a person to take his or her own life, and the risk factors associated with suicide are exceedingly complex and multifaceted. Suicide is a worldwide phenomenon, and its total elimination is considered virtually impossible. Nevertheless, many suicides can be prevented through concerted action and through the implementation of the right strategy. In September 2007, following concerns about the number of suicides in Northern Ireland almost doubling — from an average of 150 between 1999 and 2004, to just under 300 in 2006 — the Health Committee embarked on an inquiry to examine a strategic approach to the prevention of suicide and self-harm in Northern Ireland.

Over a seven-month period, the Committee heard more than 16 hours of oral evidence and questioned 60 individuals representing around 30 organisations. Almost 70 written submissions were considered from a wide variety of individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland and further afield.

The Committee visited Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to learn from their experience, and we are grateful to all of those who helped with the inquiry, including those who gave oral or written evidence and those whom we met during our visits. I wish to acknowledge and thank the Committee staff and our researcher for their work throughout the inquiry. I particularly want to put on record my sincere appreciation of the sheer courage and commitment of those bereaved families who shared their intimate experiences and first-hand knowledge of living with the horrific consequences of suicide.

The suicide strategy ‘Protect Life: A Shared Vision’ is relatively new, and was published in October 2006. The Committee’s overall conclusion is that that strategy was developed after very extensive consultation and involvement, and represents a major step forward in an effort to reduce the needless loss of life through suicide.

The current approach to dealing with the issue can be divided into three parts: working to prevent suicide; dealing with attempted or completed suicides; and providing support and services to bereaved families in the aftermath of a completed suicide. The emphasis on prevention is certainly the right approach.

During the Committee’s visit to Scotland, the challenge was very well described. It was compared to a person in a river who is approaching a waterfall — how much better and easier it was to rescue them further upstream, before they reached the edge. In its submissions, the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH), referred to the work of Professor Aaron Antonovsky, who took that analogy one step further. He questioned the emphasis on saving swimmers who are drowning downstream by heroic measures, rather than asking who or what pushed them into the river in the first place.

The many factors that can lead someone to consider suicide or cause them to seriously self-harm must be examined, and those issues must be tackled at source. It is also essential to put in place the necessary contract support and services to help people to cope if they reach the point of contemplating suicide.

Although the current approach is on the right lines and in keeping with international good practice, the Committee has identified a number of areas where it believes that the strategy can be strengthened and enhanced. Those matters are set out in the 26 recommendations that are contained in the report. I will not be able to deal with all of those recommendations in

the time available, so I shall concentrate on a number of them. I am sure that members of the Committee will wish to highlight other issues.

Suicide is not just a health issue; it is an issue for wider society, and it cannot be addressed from a health perspective alone. Although the Health Minister must take the lead, the Committee accepts that it is not solely a matter for the Health Department. All other Departments have a role to play, and we are calling on them for a greater commitment and involvement — that is why many recommendations are aimed at other Ministers, and why the motion before the Assembly is aimed at the Executive.

We recognise that a number of other Departments are involved at present. For example, four other Departments are represented on the suicide strategy implementation body: Education (DE); Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD); Employment and Learning (DEL); and Social Development (DSD).

We welcome the establishment last year of the ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention. However, aside from the Department of Health, only the Education Minister and the junior Ministers are involved. I have some concern about the workings of that group. Membership of the group is the first issue; I want to ask the Minister whether he has taken on board the Committee's request that the Minister for Employment and Learning be included on it.

Secondly, the group meets very infrequently. I understand that, to date, it has met on only three occasions, the most recent meeting having taken place in October 2007. That does not show a very deep commitment to cross-departmental working. Thirdly, the terms of reference indicate that the group is required to identify and agree a draft action plan for discussion at Executive level. The Committee believes that the Executive now have an opportunity to consider how the role of the ministerial group can be further developed and to ensure a greater commitment and involvement by all Departments.

The Committee examined the strategic approach set out in the Protect Life document and notes that it entails a two-pronged approach. It involves a targeting of the general population and a focus on specific priority groups. The Committee supports that overall approach but believes that the identified priority groups must be examined and redefined to include older people and those living in rural areas.

Age Concern told the Committee that, sadly, suicide and self-harm are also significant issues in later life. Others highlighted the difficulties faced in rural areas, with farmers and farm workers identified as being a high-risk group. It has been argued before the Committee that there is often a greater stigma in rural communities about mental-health problems. People in

rural areas can also find it difficult to access suitable services in their areas.

The Committee believes that the structure for the implementation of the strategy can, and should, be strengthened and improved. The Committee's main concern is that the current structure lacks an easily identifiable, dedicated organisation to manage and act as a central focus for implementation of the strategy. It relies on the suicide strategy implementation body (SSIB) carrying out that function. The SSIB performs a vital role in bringing together the many diverse stakeholders and helping to develop policies that must continue. However, the SSIB has more than 40 members and meets periodically, and it cannot provide that central management focus and point of contact on a daily basis.

The Committee is calling on the Minister to establish a designated suicide prevention directorate, along similar lines to the National Office for Suicide Prevention in the Republic of Ireland. The Committee believes that a dedicated suicide director and team would provide a direct central contact point for all stakeholders. It would help to build a higher degree of expertise and experience in planning and delivering the strategy. The Committee proposes that that directorate should form part of the proposed new regional public health agency. Linked to that directorate, the Committee is calling for a dedicated Protect Life website, which would be a key central resource and information point.

The Committee also examined the level of stakeholder involvement. I referred earlier to the SSIB, which comprises 40 stakeholders; that clearly represents widespread participation and involvement. However, the Committee believes that that aspect can be further strengthened and improved. We identified three major sectors that are either not involved in the SSIB or not as involved as they should be — Churches, local authorities and sports bodies. We are pleased that the leaders of the four main Churches in Northern Ireland came to give evidence to the Committee, and we welcome their commitment to playing their full part in addressing the issues of suicide and self-harm.

Members of the clergy have a fundamental role in dealing with people who might be contemplating suicide — they are, after all, among the first to be called on when someone takes his or her own life. They are deeply involved in caring for bereaved families in the aftermath of a suicide. I understand that the Churches are now represented on the SSIB, and that role could be developed and improved.

Local authorities assured the Committee that they are keen to be involved in the ongoing development and delivery of the strategy but that they have not been so involved to date. Some have taken significant action

on the issue of suicide in their areas. The chief executive of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) summed up the overall situation when she told the Committee:

“some local authorities are doing a lot; others are doing something, while some are not doing anything.”

Local authorities must, as a matter of urgency, be fully and directly involved in the SSIB and the delivery of the strategy.

Sports bodies were the third stakeholder gap that was identified. The Committee heard compelling evidence about the positive role that exercise and sport play in combating stress, anxiety and depression, and has made a recommendation in relation to that. Again, however, we are disappointed that Sport Northern Ireland and the main sports bodies have not had any direct involvement in the development and delivery of the strategy, and that must be addressed. The Committee strongly recommends the Scottish model of involving sports icons and using major sporting occasions to raise awareness of the issue of suicide and to encourage young people, particularly young men, to seek help.

The Committee's greatest concern about the strategy is that, 18 months after it was introduced, the planned review and evaluation of its key elements have not been carried out. The element of the strategy that gave most cause for concern was the decision by the Minister, at the end of January, to expand the pilot telephone helpline in north and west Belfast into a regional helpline without having evaluated the pilot exercise. Several community groups were concerned and critical about that development. A telephone helpline is an essential part of the strategy, but it must be able to cope with the expected number of calls and be supported by adequate and appropriate services. The Committee concluded that the Minister's decision on that issue was rushed and premature.

Four issues should have been addressed before the helpline was expanded. First, a robust evaluation of the pilot exercise in north and west Belfast should have been undertaken in order to learn from that experience. Representatives of community groups and bereaved families had concerns about weaknesses that were identified during the pilot exercise and which should have been addressed before it was expanded.

Secondly, there should have been a detailed assessment of whether there are sufficient referral and support services to deal with the expected volume of calls. Thirdly, the Samaritans, which has an unrivalled reputation for care and compassion in dealing with people who may be experiencing despair, distress or suicidal feelings, and which has been working in that field for more than 50 years, expressed concerns about a possible duplication of services. Detailed discussions

should take place with the Samaritans, and both helplines should work in close partnership.

Finally, the need for a helpline that is accessible to young people through mobile phones and other modern media should be considered.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Breathing Space helpline in Scotland is supported by all the major mobile phone providers there, and similar arrangements and support should be allowed in Northern Ireland.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the Committee's motion; and, as a soon-to-be former member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I express my gratitude and pride at having been involved in this inquiry, which is a fundamental piece of work.

I acknowledge the commitment and diligence of the Committee staff, the principal researcher, Research and Library Services, and the many witnesses who appeared before the Committee.

In particular, I pay tribute to the families and friends of those who have been bereaved through suicide and who gave evidence to the Committee and shared their experiences of the grief of losing loved ones through suicide. Given that they, more than most, live every day with the aftermath of suicide, we must therefore take on board their recommendations about how to improve services to families and those who are at risk of suicide and self-harm.

12.30 pm

As Iris Robinson said, the report contains 26 recommendations, which are structured under the following headings: strategic approach; stakeholder involvement; services and support; experience elsewhere; and other issues. The report's findings are crucial in determining how the Minister, the Executive and, hopefully, the ministerial subgroup will implement the recommendations and how they will be translated into priorities for action. As the Chairperson pointed out, suicide is not solely a health issue — it is everyone's business.

We are fortunate to have the Protect Life suicide-prevention strategy. However, it has become obvious that it must be reviewed and redefined in that we must ensure that it includes older people and people who live in rural communities.

There is a huge concern that the current structure lacks a dedicated team to manage and direct the strategy. The Minister must consider strongly the appointment

of a suicide-prevention director as part of the proposed new regional public-health authority. The need for a director was borne out by the lack of any robust monitoring or evaluation of the Protect Life strategy. Although the arrangements for a review have been placed firmly in the strategy, they could have been actioned by a director. Furthermore, we must ensure that funding for the Protect Life strategy is ring-fenced for several years, as the constant insecurity and uncertainty about the future of funding for groups and services must end. The Committee recommended that funding be extended to cover three years, rather than being granted in one-year cycles.

We welcome the establishment of the ministerial subgroup, which is chaired by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and we commend the Minister of Education for introducing independent counselling and support services in post-primary schools. However, those services should be extended to all schools, as early opportunities for raising awareness and for providing coping skills, talking therapies and, above all, intervention, will no doubt increase people's emotional well-being and promote good mental health.

The Committee was disappointed that Sport NI and other sporting bodies have not been involved directly in the development or implementation of the Protect Life strategy. As the Chairperson said, the main sporting bodies in Scotland have used sporting icons to promote good mental health and to encourage young people, particularly young men, to seek help. Perhaps the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure could work with the ministerial subgroup to find a way to close that gap. Training and awareness-raising programmes such as applied suicide intervention skills training (ASIST) should be incorporated into the strategy.

During the Committee evidence sessions, it became apparent that a major concern related to the hastiness of the decision to extend the pilot helpline in north and west Belfast into a regional helpline. Issues that were not taken into consideration included the lack of evaluation, assessment and consideration about backup services and support, and the inadequate consultation with groups that are working daily to prevent suicide and self-harm. A robust monitoring and evaluation process should have been carried out before the launch of the regional helpline and before any other mental-health support services are highlighted in a high-profile public campaign.

I support the motion, and I hope that the Minister will put the recommendations into action. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCallister: I thank my colleagues on the Health Committee for producing the report, and I thank the Committee staff for their support. I also

reiterate the Chairperson's words of thanks to everyone who took the time to give evidence.

The report is an example of how a Committee can contribute constructively to the work of a Government Department. Suicide and self-harm are two of the most serious and difficult problems faced by society. In recent years, the suicide rate has soared, and, although the 2007 figures show a decrease, Members will agree that any suicide is a tragedy that has far-reaching and damaging effects for family, friends and people with mental-health issues.

I acknowledge the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Protect Life strategy and recognise the Minister's hard work with other Departments and the community sector to reduce suicide rates by providing services and support for some of the most vulnerable people in society. However, this report, in conjunction with the recommendations in the 'Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (Northern Ireland)' provides a unique tool to help the Minister evaluate and improve upon the progress that has already been made.

Mental-health problems and suicide are complex issues. The pressures of modern life can be overwhelming, and people who have limited social support, coping skills or poor mental health can become a suicide risk. Substance and alcohol abuse, social deprivation, and rural isolation are also factors. Suicide prevention is the responsibility of everyone in society, and we must adopt a holistic and integrated approach.

Although the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has taken the lead on this issue, all Departments must work together to tackle that multifaceted problem. Therefore, I welcome the establishment of the ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention.

It is recognised that certain groups in society are at greater risk than others; young men aged 14 to 25 are high risk. However, we must focus our attention on all people who suffer from mental-health problems and who can become suicidal. More preventative action must be taken or we will be in danger of employing ourselves in crisis management. There is, for example, a great need for the development of coping skills and individual development at a young age. The development of such life skills must happen at primary and post-primary school level. The Minister of Education has a responsibility in that area, and, in consultation with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety more can be done.

I welcome the Committee's report, specifically the recognition that people from rural areas are at risk; suicide and self-harm is often considered an urban problem. However, many stresses exist in rural communities, and individuals are not given the attention

that they require. Similarly, services and help are often not as readily available in remote areas. Older people can also be ignored in relevant strategies, and more must be done to make available to them the services that can help.

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

I commend the work of the community and voluntary sector. However, there is a warranted concern, because charities and financially vulnerable groups receive funding annually. I understand that the Minister has been constrained by a limited budget. We must do more to guarantee the future of those groups, and I welcome the Minister's recent —

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Member agree that the motion calls on the Executive to introduce a time-bound programme to implement the recommendations outlined in the report? Although the Committee recognises that there are budgetary issues, that should not hinder delivery on the recommendations.

Mr McCallister: I thank Ms Ramsey for that intervention. I agree, and I support Ms Ní Chuilín's earlier point that funding must be cyclical. It should be delivered on a minimum three-yearly cycle. Groups that receive annual funding spend an immeasurable amount of time trying to secure funding for the next year.

The report highlights the need to take a more holistic and strategic approach to suicide and mental-health issues in Northern Ireland. The Minister has done a great deal of good work on the matter, and the report should be considered as an aid to his attempts to build on what has already been achieved.

I know what you are going to tell me, Mr Deputy Speaker, so to conclude, I commend the report as an excellent piece of work, and I support the motion.

Mr Gallagher: Many people have put a great deal of time and effort into the publication of the report. I thank the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson, my Committee colleagues, the Committee's support staff, and, in particular, all those who responded to the inquiry either through written submissions or by participation in the hearings.

The report is intended to build on the Protect Life strategy. It is a detailed report that has been compiled against a background of growing suicide rates in Northern Ireland and a worrying increase in the number of incidents of self-harm. The report contains contributions from bereaved families who are trying to cope with their grief. They express anger about the absence of suitable referral services at those times that they were experiencing difficulties.

The evidence from a range of sources shows that suicide rates have been increasing. Victims come from across the age spectrum, from the quite young to the very old, and they come from both urban and rural

areas. Presentations were made at the evidence sessions by psychiatrists, GPs, representatives of the Churches, local authorities, and voluntary and community organisations, all of whom had strong messages for the Committee.

Assistance for the bereaved is often poor or non-existent, as are the back-up services for those who self-harm. That is despite the fact that 51% of suicide victims will have self-harmed previously. As other Members said, the issue of resources was mentioned repeatedly in the evidence sessions, as were the need for better referral services and the lack of patient facilities for adolescents with serious mental-health problems.

The Committee agreed that the provision of specialist 24-hour support services at every accident and emergency unit for those with suicidal or self-harming tendencies was essential in any new strategy. Many community and voluntary organisations told the Committee that their work was constrained because they were funded on a year-to-year basis. John McCallister mentioned that a strong case was made for programmes to be funded on a three- or five-year basis.

The Committee heard about the strong link that exists between alcohol and substance abuse and mental-health problems. The experts confirmed that 50% of self-harm incidents involved either alcohol or drugs. That being the case, we cannot ignore the easy availability of alcohol to young people and the tendency towards binge drinking. The importance of education in promoting good mental health and providing young people with coping skills was also raised.

Although the Department of Education has taken some steps towards introducing counselling services, much more needs to be done. Counselling services should be available in all primary and secondary schools, and considerable resources must be invested to back them up. The people who deliver those services must be trained properly and must have the necessary resources available to them.

As we know, many matters require resources. However, given the devastating consequences of suicide and self-harm for individuals, their families and their friends — and given that that terrible problem is increasing — this issue must be prioritised if we are to build a humane society.

12.45 pm

Dr Deeny: I am delighted to take part in this debate on the awful scourge of suicide as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and I am proud and honoured to have had the privilege of working on the Committee's detailed report. I also speak as a GP who has had to deal with suicide and its awful aftermath. Suicide is very much a family disease, because families often suffer the effects

of a suicide for many years afterwards. Often, they never fully recover.

Much hard work went into producing the report, and I wish to thank the Committee Clerk, his team and our researcher, as well as my fellow Health Committee members. I reiterate what the Chairperson, Mrs Robinson, said about suicide being a societal problem. We need the support of wider society in order to deal with the awful disease of suicide. I welcome the Health Minister's presence for the debate.

Although we health professionals will take the lead in dealing with the serious issue of suicide, we must have community support. I say that because I have experience of such situations, and although many people who take their own lives have serious mental-health disorders, such as depression, others do not. Some people who take their own lives are not clinically depressed, and neither their families nor health professionals considered them to have a mental-health problem. However, because of a life event that they deemed a life crisis, they felt that they should take their own lives. That is an important point.

I recall dealing with two recent incidents in which young men took their own lives. Both of those suicides were caused by relationship break-ups. Neither their families nor we, their GPs, knew about their difficulties. That problem relates to a lack of coping skills — an issue that has already been mentioned. Education can help people to deal with hardship. Although I do not wish to judge the younger generation, it seems that the more affluent we become, the less able we are to deal with hardship, and the fewer coping skills we have. Although some Members might consider something a life event, a young person might consider it a life crisis, out of which he or she can see no way.

I wish to make four points about the recommendations. First, as has been mentioned, the Department — albeit with good intentions — moved too quickly to extend the north and west Belfast pilot Lifeline scheme. Nonetheless, that helpline represents the way forward. We all make mistakes sometimes through haste, although our motives were right.

I like the name Lifeline, which is well known and well recognised. I do not know what the scheme's phone number is, but I understand that it is long. I would prefer it to be a three- or four-digit number that is easily remembered, because when people are in despair, they cannot remember an eight- or nine-digit phone number. An easily remembered number, such as 444, might be better.

As a GP, I recognise that someone who has not previously suffered a mental-health condition can go through a vulnerable period. The Committee saw a wonderful facility outside Dublin, Pieta House, to which people can refer themselves — or they may be

immediately referred by relatives, accident-and-emergency departments, the police or health professionals. That immediate referral is important, because we must reach people during that vulnerable period. There is no point in people waiting until they see their GP or can get a referral to a psychiatric outpatient unit — that simply takes too long, and they might take their own lives in the meantime.

Secondly, I am delighted that the Minister is in the Chamber, because I would like him to make a commitment on talking therapies. My fellow GPs and I find it frustrating to have to prescribe antidepressants because our patients have to wait for a year for talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, and I admit that I have done that. Such therapies must have support and resources.

Thirdly, I am very interested in the benefits of sport and exercise. The Minister will see the Committee's proposals on that. I played a part in drawing up those recommendations, and my fellow GPs will support them. Provided that they can select the appropriate patients, there is no reason why GPs in Northern Ireland should not prescribe sport for people with mental-health problems — it really helps. I have seen that for myself in the case of a patient of mine who suffers from depression and who attended my surgery on Friday. He goes to the local leisure centre.

One month's membership of a leisure centre is not too expensive compared to the cost of very expensive drugs, and it really does work. Doctors have to lift and encourage people to get them to that level of motivation; that is our job.

Finally, I would like to hear the Health Minister giving his commitment to support health professionals, including myself and my colleagues, who are exposed to dreadful scenes when dealing with this issue. It is important that we are supported by the Minister and the Department.

Mr Easton: I know that all Members will welcome the Committee's 'Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm'. I praise the Chairperson and Committee members for their work, especially the Committee Clerk and staff who spent long hours working on the report.

In this matter, the Committee was responding to support families and communities that have been devastated by the pain and suffering caused through the loss of loved ones through suicide. The Committee was recognising the need for a comprehensive strategy, made imperative by the scale of the problem across Northern Ireland.

Like many investigations, we found that the results confirmed what we already knew. However, those results did bring specific areas of required action into sharper focus. The report enables us to identify and

prioritise the steps to be taken and establishes the structures and resources needed to tackle a problem that affects us all.

In particular, we must recognise the need for a multifaceted approach involving all Government Departments and community agencies. Close co-operation by community groups, churches, youth organisations, medical practitioners and outreach workers is vital. It is that close co-operation and communication that will help us to develop strategies that identify those at risk and provide the best possible response and targeting of resources.

We can learn a great deal from other jurisdictions, including Scotland, which has a similar demographic and social structure to Northern Ireland. Adequate funding that is sustained and ring-fenced for a determined period is vital so that a full range of support systems can be put in place for a defined period and so that we can evaluate the effectiveness of our response over time.

Our plans for local areas must acknowledge the different needs of rural and urban communities and include well-resourced suicide helplines and walk-in centres, so that those at risk can find help close at hand. The Committee visited a similar walk-in centre, Pieta House in Dublin, and I would highly recommend it as a good example of that service.

Dedicated drug and alcohol clinics need to be established across the Province. Those clinics should use and build on the expertise and experience of local people who have been dealing with vulnerable people over many years, often without recognition or adequate support.

A joined-up approach that engages the expertise and resources of all Government Departments, the PSNI, the media, and the communities we serve, is absolutely vital. Time is of the essence; another suicide is one too many. We recognise that our young people, living in these difficult and dangerous times, face pressure on all sides and from different issues. We must let them know through the actions that we take and by the support we put in place that they matter to us as people and individuals. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off their mobile phones as the sound system is experiencing interference.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. It is a pity that members of the Committee, after months of hard work in bringing the report to this stage, get only five minutes to speak in the debate. I take on board that there is a need for a time limit, but there are a lot of things that most, if not all of us, would want to say.

As others have said, around 195 people take their lives each year, and 4,500 people are admitted to

hospital following an attempt at suicide or self-harming. We need to take on board that those numbers are not just statistics, they are human beings, and their family members are part of our community.

I welcome the suicide prevention strategy that other Members have spoken about. However, we must ask whether that strategy is working, because statistics seem to suggest that it is not. A number of issues emerged during the Committee's inquiry, including the recognition that a one-size-fits-all solution will not work. Various groups and organisations that gave evidence to the Committee called for the strategy to be refined to take into account the risk of suicide among older people and those living in rural communities. Age Concern stated that:

"Depression is the leading cause of suicide in older people... Other risk factors include sleep problems such as insomnia, and alcohol consumption, particularly for men."

The Rural Community Network informed the Committee that farmers and farm workers have been identified as a high risk group for stress, depression and suicide.

I welcome the Minister's personal commitment to tackling suicide and self-harm. I know that he received a copy of the embargoed report so I hope that he will update us on his position regarding the 26 recommendations. According to the British Medical Association (BMA), evidence shows that social changes are required to reduce the number of suicides. Those changes could include increasing the price of alcohol. That would reduce the harm caused by excessive use of alcohol, particularly among vulnerable groups. Indeed, the Minister made a statement on alcohol and drug misuse last week. However, as I said to John McCallister, the Committee accepts that this is not solely a health issue — the Executive, as a whole, have a part in play.

One of the main recommendations that other Members have spoken about is long-term and ring-fenced funding. That issue was raised repeatedly during our inquiry, and a number of groups expressed grave concern about the level of funding and the uncertainty surrounding it. Michael Doherty from the West Belfast Suicide Awareness and Support Group told the Committee:

"When the strategy was first launched, people lauded it and the additional money that came with it. However, funding has been totally inadequate, as well as the manner in which it has been handled."

Philip McTaggart from the Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-harm (PIPS) told the Committee:

"I constantly hear about £3 million that is being invested in suicide prevention. However, the real figure for the money that goes to work on the ground is only £1.3 million."

We must establish which figures are correct. I would welcome an update from the Minister on that because those are the concerns of people who are working at the sharp end of suicide prevention. There is a big problem if such people have difficulty finding out information and accessing funding.

I commend the families and people in the community and voluntary sector who have been involved in the inquiry. Their commitment to trying to prevent suicide and self-harm, whether directly or indirectly, has been particularly significant. They should take credit because, without their hard work, suicide figures would be higher. As Caral Ní Chuilín has done, I also welcome the ministerial subgroup's involvement. There are a number of issues that the Committee will raise with the Minister over time.

It is important to quote one of the families that has been affected by suicide and self-harm. Bobby Cosgrove from the Families Forum told the Committee:

"We do not come at this issue from a professional background; the only hidden agendas that we have are lying in the graves. That is where we are coming from. With our hearts and souls, we want to help people through what we went through and to try to make life easier for them. We see the horrors that are happening, and we believe that we can make an impact."

As the motion states, I hope that a programme will be produced to implement the recommendations before the summer recess. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, support the motion as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I call on all Members to rally behind the Committee and lend their support to this important matter. As other Members have said, I thank everyone who participated in the debate on the prevention of suicide and self-harm that has brought us to this point. Given the detail in the report, it is unfortunate that we have been limited to such a short time in which to set the scene and to present the issues.

The number of suicides across Northern Ireland has been increasing in recent years. As Sue Ramsey mentioned, current figures reveal that 195 people take their own lives each year. That plunges families into unexpected grief and sorrow and leaves many questions unanswered.

1.00 pm

Moreover, some 4,500 people are annually admitted to hospital, having either attempted suicide or inflicted serious injury on themselves as a result of deliberate self-harm. It is important, therefore, to recognise that suicide is neither an illness nor a condition but a final act to which many complex issues can contribute. Evidence shows that no single reason explains why someone takes his or her life. In taking evidence, the Health Committee learned that the factors linked to suicide are manifold: social pressures; low self-esteem;

lack of opportunities; limited educational and employment opportunities; limited access to mental-health support; lack of communication; the impact of bullying; physical or sexual abuse; drug and alcohol misuse; and long-term medical conditions. All those issues must be tackled adequately.

Suicide affects people from all walks of life: the young and old; the rich and poor; and those from urban and rural areas. Joined-up work at Government level is required, as is ongoing engagement with all primary stakeholders, particularly bereaved families. Although the Committee recognises the development of the 'Protect Life: A Shared Vision — The Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2006-2011' as a major step forward in the battle to reduce incidences of suicide in Northern Ireland, its members nevertheless believe that the strategy must be strengthened and redefined to include other priority groups. It must form part of a holistic approach and have a clear strategy, based on the Bamford Review's recommendations and the Committee recommendations.

At the start of our inquiry, bereaved families' representatives argued that lost opportunities at accident and emergency departments can be fatal, especially for those with alcohol and drug problems, who are six times more likely to commit suicide. Representatives called for a place of safety, or a chill-out room, to be provided at all accident and emergency departments until those who present with self-harm and suicidal tendencies can be properly assessed. That is one way in which to deal with the plight of people in rural areas, who so often feel isolated, with nowhere to go and no one to talk to. Kieran Deeny mentioned talking therapies, which is another measure that must be considered urgently. Like all other constituencies, West Tyrone has suffered from deaths through suicide. All its bereaved families are pleading for help, and ask what help and support is available for those who are left behind.

I hope that this report, which makes 26 recommendations, will see the dawning of a new day for those who suffer from depression and suicidal tendencies. I call on the Executive to announce a time frame for the implementation of the recommendations, as stated in the motion.

Mr Beggs: This debate is an example of how an Assembly Committee can make a reasoned, useful contribution to policy formation on a matter of significant public interest.

Suicide is both a personal and a family tragedy. In September 2007, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety said:

"the onus is on us all, communities, voluntary organisations, the media, the statutory sector and society as a whole, to work together to achieve a reduction in our suicide rate."

We all share a social responsibility to address the issue of suicide. The Committee's report reflects the Minister's call. The report recognises the role in suicide prevention of families, community groups, educational institutions, Churches and faith communities, sporting bodies and local authorities. It properly recognises that although Government have a crucial role to play, they do not hold the full answer. We all have an obligation to promote a culture of life.

The report states:

"The situation in Northern Ireland is congruent with the wider global trend of a growing number of people dying by suicide in almost every region of the world."

That is a sad and significant comment, and it is a sad reflection on society and the modern world in which we live. However, it is not an excuse for inaction by society. The report states:

"the number of registered suicides in Northern Ireland has effectively doubled since 2004."

Everyone — especially parents of teenage children — should be concerned about that. Teenage boys are considered to be at a higher risk of suicide.

There are many ways in which to measure a society's progress, including its political stability, economic growth, and the way in which it treats its most vulnerable. However, society can also be judged by the strength of its commitment to preventing suicide, because the manner in which it does that demonstrates respect for human dignity and a determination to secure opportunity and equality for all.

I welcome the fact that the report highlights the need to focus on all people in society, not only those who are perceived to be high risk. The young and the old, those who live in rural and urban settings, and those who come from different socio-economic backgrounds must be given the support and help that they need to ensure good mental health. That diversity highlights the need to continue to develop a comprehensive, flexible and strategic policy that will address differing circumstances effectively.

There is a need for all Departments to tackle this issue. I commend the families who have come together to set up such organisations as Families Forum. The Minister should consider the invaluable insight, knowledge and commitment that they have channelled towards helping others — as did the Health Committee in its inquiry.

The report highlights the importance of the introduction of an independent counselling support service in post-primary schools, and I echo to the Minister of Education the call to extend that service to the primary sector as soon as possible. Available evidence suggests that early-years intervention on a number of issues is critical, proactive and preventative. The approach to good mental health should be no different. The

emotional health and well-being programme should be extended to the primary-school sector as soon as possible. The complexity of children's emotional development can often be sidelined and forgotten when their cases are being dealt with, and that must be addressed.

There has been much discussion in the media about Internet sites that promote suicides. I commend the Health Minister for his action in that area. As a society, we must listen more, and we must also facilitate the community and voluntary groups and health professionals who seek to help people with mental-health issues. It is important that adequate funding and a policy framework be in place to allow the community and voluntary groups and health professionals to help the vulnerable in society.

I commend the motion, and I look forward to the Departments and trusts implementing the recommendations to help those in greatest need.

Mr A Maginness: I am not a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, but I have read the report — albeit not as fully as I would have liked. I welcome the report and the work of the Committee, and I commend the Chairperson and Committee members for producing it. The report is useful for someone such as me, who, for a number of reasons, is interested in the subject. I am particularly interested in this matter because North Belfast has one of the highest incidences of suicide and self-harm in Northern Ireland.

One of the main predictors of suicide is self-harm, and those rates are at an alarmingly high level. There have been 4,500 hospital admissions relating to self-harm in the past year.

That indicates that there is a great deal of potential for suicide in our society. The medical evidence quite convincingly indicates that those who self-harm are potentially suicidal. Many of those people are simply crying out for help. It is, therefore, important that we create a strategy that focuses on that link.

I am delighted that the report notes the work of the Mater Hospital, which is pre-eminent in dealing with psychiatric problems in the greater Belfast area. It has a team that concentrates to a large extent on those who have, unfortunately, self-harmed. I note that the member of the team who gave evidence, Dr Philip McGarry — a former Belfast City Council colleague of mine — emphasised that the unit in the Mater Hospital is only temporary.

Given the considerable success that that team has had with those who have self-harmed, I appeal to the Minister — and, indeed, plead with him — to consider making its funding permanent. The team provides follow-up help for a short period after an incident of self-harm, as well as active and intensive support, and

it has produced encouraging results with those who have self-harmed. As I said, it is a temporary project, but it is producing work of a very high standard.

I also highlight the fact that 10% of those who self-harm are adolescents. That is an appalling statistic, equating to almost 500 young people who have been affected by self-harming and who are potentially suicidal.

One of the other points that Dr McGarry — among others — emphasised was the prevalence of alcohol abuse and its influence in creating situations in which people self-harm. Without alcohol, it is probable that those people would not self-harm. Dr McGarry emphasised the need for a more comprehensive approach to alcohol that would include dealing with its relatively low cost, its availability, alcohol brands sponsoring sporting events, and its being advertised as a glamorous product that makes troubles disappear. We know that that does not happen and that alcohol compounds a person's troubles.

My final point relates to the use of cannabis. There is a high level of cannabis use in many parts of Belfast, particularly in my constituency. There is a culture of tolerance towards it and a belief — especially among young people — that it is not harmful. It is harmful, and we should, therefore, take a censorious and hostile view of its use.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although I am not a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the motion, and I welcome the fact that the Committee tabled it.

It is difficult to imagine an issue that exists in today's Ireland that is more compelling than that of people taking their own lives. Last year, almost 300 — mostly young — people from across the North ended their lives. That is a rate of almost one a day. On the island as a whole, more people commit suicide than die on our roads. That represents a loss of life on an almost unimaginable scale. In my constituency of Foyle, I have spent too many days visiting homes where families have been literally torn apart by the devastation of suicide. There are no words of comfort that I, or anyone else, can offer to a mother, father, brother or sister whose entire world has collapsed in the wake of their loved one having committed suicide. No family should have to endure such trauma and heartache.

1.15 pm

As a society, we need to examine what we are doing for today's young people. What world are we leaving for them? We all know that it is a world of cut-throat, competitive pursuits. Furthermore, it is a world that is based on inequality and materialism, with communities plagued by drug pushers who are peddling poisonous substances into young minds.

When faced with suicide, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of reducing the circumstances to the individual trauma. We must be sure not to dislocate the relationship between individual suffering and the societal context that gives rise to it. That is why it is good to note the cross-departmental recommendations in the Committee's report.

We all have to do something about suicide. A serious problem exists in the under-provision of psychiatric and community services for children, adolescents and young people in the North. There is a clear need for help and support for families and others living with someone who is struggling and who may be contemplating taking his or her own life, self-harming, or suffering from mental illness. The Committee's report highlights that, and has addressed such issues quite well.

The recommendations in the report highlight many of the problems that must be addressed if we are to have a serious impact on the issue. In particular, there is a lack of follow-up care and assessment for those who self-harm and are at risk of suicide. I recently attended a meeting with a number of groups that are involved in suicide prevention in the Derry area. One of the groups was Foyle Search and Rescue, which has conducted incredible work over the years saving countless lives. I was stunned to learn that there is often little follow-up care for the people whom Foyle Search and Rescue save. I can only imagine the frustration felt by its dedicated volunteers when they see a person whom they have saved, and whom they know is at risk of suicide, being released from hospital a few hours later, with little or no aftercare.

Such gaps in services must be addressed by the entire Executive. Greater access to treatment and therapies for people with anxiety and depression disorders is also required. ASIST programmes should be rolled out as widely as possible, and the concerns about the regional suicide helpline need to be addressed by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. That has been articulated in many contributions today.

The recommendations of the report will help to address all such issues and more. I urge all Members to support the motion and all the recommendations, and I hope that we will see a programme of work and follow-up action as a result. Of all the responsibilities that we have been entrusted with as public servants, none is greater than our responsibility to protect life. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to show my support for the Committee's report on its inquiry into the prevention of suicide and self-harm.

Suicide has been a major source of concern in Northern Ireland for many years. Recent statistics

show that, unfortunately, it has become more prevalent. Indeed, it is a major issue in my constituency.

We are all familiar with the village of Laurelvale, which is close to Tandragee in County Armagh. It is a pleasant, small village, which is home to many young people. Last year, it was, unfortunately, in the national news following a harrowing spate of suicides. The tragic deaths of four young men, who should be enjoying life to the full, shocked the rural community to the core. Our thoughts are still with their families.

There was a similar story in my home village of Richhill, which is a small, quiet rural village that is only a few miles from Laurelvale. The only difference was that the age range was more varied. Young, old and middle-aged men and women took their own lives. It is a sad story.

Families try to draw conclusions and attempt to reason why such tragedies occur. Based on comments following such incidents, the common theme is that it is very difficult to detect whether a person is having suicidal thoughts. How often have we heard that people did not see any signs that a suicide might occur?

The research in the report refers to the need for an increased roll-out of the ASIST programme. The report highlights how far we still have to go in order to get to grips with the problem. Four suicides in one small village — in such quick succession — are very difficult to understand. It was devastating for the area concerned.

I welcome the report as an attempt to redouble efforts to deal with this difficult issue. A big obstacle in reducing suicide rates will be the ability to detect any signs that such a course of action is being contemplated. I welcome the call for a designated suicide prevention directorate. Those in key positions — such as schoolteachers, nurses, doctors and members of the clergy — must be better equipped to spot any signs and must be able to intervene, using the correct procedures. The right services must exist in order to help the people concerned.

I welcome recommendation 21, which refers to responsible media reporting. After the Laurelvale tragedy, media reports referred to a “suicide pact list”. That turned out to be false, but it was deeply disturbing and unsettling for an already grieving community, and it should not have been reported.

We have a long way to go, but I welcome the report as a significant step in the right direction. I ask the Minister to give his full commitment to implementing the recommendations as soon as possible.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an tuairisc chuimsitheach seo, agus tréaslaím leis an Choiste Sláinte as í a chur le chéile.

I welcome the report, and I congratulate the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the work that has been done in compiling a comprehensive document.

From my experience of teaching, I know that many post-primary schools and some primary schools have developed programmes of social and personal development and life skills. Those programmes are delivered to pupils through the schools’ pastoral systems of year heads and form teachers. Social and personal development and life skills programmes have had a positive influence in developing the emotional health and well-being of pupils.

Although those programmes are not solely devoted to developing emotional health and well-being, they usually contain a number of useful units that deal with emotional awareness and help young people to learn how to deal with negative thoughts and strong emotions.

Health education is another area of the curriculum in which to deal with emotional health and well-being. Traditionally, health has been largely considered in physical terms, and, to some extent, the issue of emotional health and well-being has been ignored. It is now time to expand our vision and change that outlook.

Some schools have already appointed either full-time or part-time counsellors. Such professionals have proved to be a tremendous asset to pupils during emotional hardship. Counsellors are at their most effective when working through, and as part of, the agreed referral procedure of schools’ pastoral systems.

Many schools report positively on the work of counsellors. I welcome the Department of Education’s initiative, which has introduced an independent counselling service to schools. That is a positive move, and it is reassuring that 95% of post-primary schools have accepted the offer of that service. I hope that the 5% that did not accept the offer already have their own counsellors in place or will become involved in the scheme in the future. I add my support to the report’s recommendation that the counselling service should be extended to primary education.

As with so many other issues in education, early recognition and intervention are essential in promoting emotional health and well-being. We subscribe to the notion that all children should be literate and numerate when they leave school. We should now subscribe to the belief that pupils should be moving towards emotional health and well-being from their earliest involvement in primary, post-primary, further and higher education and, indeed, on a life-long learning basis. We are not one-dimensional beings, and our education should reflect our many aspects in a holistic way.

In the report, the Children’s Commissioner said that the service should be developed in consultation with

children and young people to ensure that it is designed to meet their needs.

This morning, I noted the results of a survey carried out by RTE and the 'Irish Independent' on cyber bullying, which revealed the alarming statistics that one in five teenage girls is subjected to cyber bullying. Modern life brings many challenges.

I welcome the work being undertaken by the Department of Education in developing its emotional health and well-being programme for pupils, and, as with the counselling service, agree that pupils' views should be listened to and incorporated into that programme.

For far too long, the issues of suicide and self-harm have been shrouded in taboo and surrounded by stigma. I hope that the actions arising from the Committee's report will enable us to face up to the situation so that it may be addressed by an effective implementation plan from the Executive. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Shannon: I congratulate the Committee Chairperson, my colleague Iris Robinson, and the Committee for presenting a full and in-depth report. It is probably one of the best in-depth reports that the Assembly has debated.

Self-harm and suicide are emotive issues, and sensitivity is needed at all stages. Although the issues are separate, they are intrinsically linked because it has been shown that more than one third of the people who commit suicide have a history of self-harm. Dr Black from the British Medical Association has said that over half of the victims of suicide have self-harmed before their death. That correlation cannot be coincidence and, therefore, it makes sense that if we can reach those who self-harm, we will be able to prevent future suicides.

Self-harm, as an issue, has been covered in soap operas recently. Indeed, many young women in my constituency have come forward for help and counselling to youth facilities, such as the Link Family and Community Centre in Newtownards, after having watched such programmes. The staff in the centre are trained to deal with such situations and to counsel young people and help them to talk about their problems. The Committee report refers to the benefits that come from such programmes — and there are benefits.

It is essential that such groups are given committed funding to help them to continue with their work. I fully endorse the recommendations to ensure that funding is ring-fenced for a minimum of three years. I doubt whether there is any Member who has not been touched by the sadness of loss in his or her community through someone taking his or her own life — we all have examples of that.

The comfort that can be offered to families is limited, which begs the question as to what we can do

in such a situation. The answer lies in the Committee's report. We can implement measures and try to ensure that a support network is available to ensure that other families in the Province do not have to go through on their own the loss of a loved one through suicide.

Members have often quoted statistics. I will recount some of them. More males die as a result of suicide than in road traffic accidents, accidental falls or poisoning; more females die as a result of suicide than in road traffic accidents; and suicide rates tend to be higher in urban, rather than rural, areas.

Recently, Members debated the merits of a graduated driver licensing scheme to lessen the number of road deaths.

Therefore, it is fitting that today the Assembly should debate another problem that causes the death of young people. I fully support the report and its recommendations.

1.30 pm

I hail from the Strangford constituency, which comprises urban and rural areas. Therefore, I am anxious to ensure that the inherently different concerns and problems of those districts are separated in order that they can be dealt with more comprehensively; the report clearly and helpfully takes that into consideration.

I wholeheartedly agree with the recommendation that DARD should ensure that crises that affect the rural community on a large scale, such as BSE or foot-and-mouth disease, are handled in a way that helps, rather than condemns, farmers. As noted in the report, the suicide rate rockets at such stressful times. On behalf of my rural constituents, I urge DARD staff, in times of crisis, to consider those who are most affected and pull together to adopt an approach that will cause less stress. It has been said that a problem shared is a problem halved, and it is, therefore, imperative that a structure be put in place to provide people with the option of counselling.

The opportunity to talk to someone is also why so many people turn directly to the Church and ministers in times of stress. I agree, therefore, that specific training should be available to the Churches to enable them to counsel those who turn to them for assistance. A link between the Churches and departmental bodies should be established to facilitate co-operation, so that people can be referred to other services when necessary.

I welcome the fact that Church leaders in Northern Ireland have expressed their commitment to tackling self-harm and suicide. In my area, many youth groups work with children from housing estates, who are more prone to self-harm. It is essential that youth workers be equipped to deal with young people who are confused, hurting and in need of help.

I do not have time to record my support for each of the report's many recommendations, but I congratulate those who compiled it, and I wholeheartedly endorse it. I urge cross-departmental co-operation on the common objectives of lessening the incidence of self-harm and suicide in the Province and ensuring that advice and help is readily available from doctors, the Churches, youth clubs and so forth. People must know that they are loved and cared for and that someone is always available to listen to them. I support the recommendations.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too welcome the publication of the report, and I congratulate the Committee on its work on this sensitive subject. The Assembly will never be able to eradicate suicide. However, it must ensure that the rate of suicide, and its effect on families and communities, is minimised as much as possible.

Only this week, another young man — 17 years old — took his life in Lurgan, which is in my constituency. Perhaps no one will ever get to the bottom of why he reached that point; families in that situation are always left asking why. As politicians in a legislative body, our responsibility is to offer society the tools to deal with the issue, and we can empower communities to act.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety does not have sole responsibility. In such circumstances, the Investing for Health strategy springs to mind. The Assembly must ensure that services are spread across all Departments, whether in terms of the communities and society in which people grow up, educational resources, or support for facilities for young or elderly people. Although the majority of suicides are young people, it must be remembered that suicide affects all age groups, and the community sector must be provided with the skills and resources to enable those working with every age group to help to prevent suicide.

It is those people who do not come into contact with mental-health services who are the most marginalised, such as one young man from my community who took his life. He showed no sign that he was suffering from depression or that he felt that life was getting on top of him. To the contrary, he was a top sportsman and first-class student. Despite that, and without warning, one evening he took his life.

Schools, and the wider community — whether it be the GAA, the rugby or the cricket club, or other organisations — must be empowered and trained to spot the signals that a person is, in the crevices of their mind, suffering from a mental-health problem, and needs to talk. Especially with regard to the Irish male, who is not renowned for speaking about his feelings at any age, there is a need to ensure that that psychological barrier is broken down, so that people of whatever age — male or female — can come forward and speak to

someone about their feelings, and that they do not take that dramatic step.

Much of the discussion and media concentration focuses on urban areas, such as north and west Belfast and Foyle. However, suicide is an issue that especially affects rural communities, because of isolation. One study pointed out Fermanagh and Leitrim as areas of risk, especially among single, male, farmers, who live an isolated lifestyle, working the farm, with no regular human contact. A way must be found of touching base with those people, to allow them the ability and the right to deal with the issues that affect them.

The stigma surrounding mental health has been mentioned several times today. That stigma must be removed. One's mental health can become affected or ill, just as one's physical health can, and, just as one would seek treatment for a bodily illness, we must ensure that mental illness is regarded in the same way. Someone suffering from a mental-health problem should not be isolated or stigmatised; it is an illness that must be treated, and people should be able to talk about it in the open and seek treatment.

I endorse the report published by the Committee. It is the beginning of a long, hard, programme for us all, and we must ensure that the necessary resources are made available to the various Departments that have to deal with the issue. I support the way ahead.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Health Committee for bringing this detailed and important report to the Floor of the Assembly, and I commend it for its outstanding work on the issue. I know that the Committee has spoken to a wide range of bodies, both inside and outside Northern Ireland. It has recognised fundamentally that many things have an influence on mental health generally, and on suicide and self-harm prevention specifically. Given the range of evidence taken by the Committee, my party has no reservation in supporting the motion. It is important that appropriate action is taken, and that people know that it is being taken. For that reason, the call for a time frame strikes the Alliance Party as a very good way forward.

The report contains some 26 recommendations, and we hope that those are put into effect as soon as possible. One reason that suicide and self-harm present such difficulty for elected representatives is that there are so many aspects to the issue. There is no typical victim. It is sometimes uncertain whether modern technology is a cause or an effect. For every high-profile case, or set of high-profile cases, such as the recent series of suicides in Armagh, or in South Wales, there are others that one never hears about. Such problems can occur to anyone, anywhere, in any circumstance, sometimes without any apparent warning. Unfortunately, all of us in this Chamber have local experience, and words cannot describe how we feel at such a sudden

loss of life. Our sympathies are with all of the families, and with all of those who are left behind.

The total number of suicides in Northern Ireland appears to be falling, and we thank God for that. We cannot, however, become complacent. How can we be sure that that is the total number? Often cases appear to go unreported. Two thirds of suicides appear to take place in areas with below-average living standards, but that still leaves one third occurring elsewhere in our community. Men are three or four times more likely to commit suicide than women; however, that still leaves a sizeable figure among women. The statistics are difficult to read, and the causes are very difficult to trace.

Two matters strike me as particularly important. First, Executive action must be properly directed. There is no room for competition among Departments or the usual silo mentality, which denies us properly joined-up government. The motion correctly implies that suicide and self-harm are issues not just for the Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety but for all Departments, including those with responsibilities for education, social development, transport, social security, sport and employment.

Secondly, there must be an end to the tick-box mentality that inhibits access to funding for counselling organisations and other groups that work directly with communities to help to prevent suicide and self-harm. Those are not matters that should depend on the proper completion of a form. Suicide and self-harm are human-interest stories that require human management.

Organisations that are doing a good job must be assured of funds and resources, even if that means that the Executive must assume financial commitments that were previously met through the European Union or external peace funds.

I pay tribute to the excellent work of organisations such as PIPS, the Samaritans and other self-help groups. The Investing for Health programme, under its manager, Lorraine Lindsay, is doing an excellent job in respect of suicide and self-harm in my constituency of Strangford.

Although there is more to this issue than mental health, the motion once again links to the Bamford Review. I am glad to see that our Health Minister is in the Chamber. I ask him to outline the current situation in respect of the review and to provide a timescale for the introduction of its recommendations.

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

Mrs Hanna: On behalf of the SDLP, I endorse the Health Committee's 'Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm'.

The report further develops and expands on the Protect Life strategy of October 2006, and builds on the recommendations of the Bamford Review. I thank the Health Committee's staff for their hard work in

preparing the report. I also thank all the people who provided written and oral evidence to the Committee.

I was humbled and I found it insightful to hear evidence from bereaved family members, counsellors and medical specialists. The families of people who take their own lives, particularly when the person who died was young, endure one of the most awful human experiences. Not one of us would want to be in their shoes.

A strategy based on the report will work only if it remains person-centred and recognises the unique value and dignity of each of us as individuals. There is no question of standardising solutions; each must be special and unique. Our community does not have a good record of valuing, protecting and respecting human life. The 35 years of the Troubles have corroded our society in a way that we are only beginning to fully comprehend.

Suicide and self-harm are not issues that are unique to Northern Ireland. We have learned lessons from methods of best practice that have been adopted in other jurisdictions, particularly in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. We visited both of those jurisdictions in order to exchange views with people who are experiencing problems caused by suicide and self-harm and to talk to professionals who work in that specialism.

Although there has been much focus on the tragic suicides of young people, suicide and self-harm also affect older people and those who live in rural areas. In an increasingly materialistic society, with widening gaps between rich and poor, the effects of suicide and self-harm are not confined to any particular class. However, economic and social pressures exacerbate the vulnerability of people.

Prevention and early intervention are vital to ensure that all our young people receive an adequate and holistic education. Prevention is always better than cure.

1.45 pm

Many years ago, when I practised as a midwife and delivered babies on the Falls Road and the Shankill Road — long before I heard phrases such as “early intervention” — I understood that the circumstances of some new parents meant that they needed more support than did others. Even in a conventional two-parent family, with extended family support, the early days with a newborn baby are daunting. However, not all babies come into the world with such support. The sooner that help is provided, in a sympathetic and non-patronising way, the better. The development of coping skills, self-respect and self-esteem must begin as early in life as possible. Appropriate programmes for emotional health and well-being must be provided in schools from the earliest years of a child's education. Prevention and early intervention are essential.

I want to mention briefly the importance of recovery programmes and of seeing everyone as an individual. Centrality of respect for each individual is vital to help that person to get his or her life back together. Peer advocacy works. People who have experienced mental illness are often best placed to understand what someone goes through. There is no Assembly Member who has not, at some stage, felt that he or she was on the edge or unable to cope. One in four people is diagnosed with mental illness at some point in life. Statistics probably under-report the actual extent of mental illness, because no one wants to admit that he or she cannot cope. In many ways, society is competitive and dog-eat-dog, with emphasis on success, not showing weakness, and on putting on one's best face at all times. Life is not a race with a prize for first place.

Mental health is still society's big taboo, and no one wants to admit to mental illness. Its perception, in an increasingly consumerist society in which there are unprecedented social and economic pressures on individuals, is judgemental and skewed. To be human is to be vulnerable and to be vulnerable is to be human. No man or woman is an island. At certain stages of their journeys through life, people need the support of family, friends and community.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I welcome the Committee's report on its inquiry into the prevention of suicide and self-harm. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. Committee members have devoted considerable time and effort to commissioning the report. There is always scope for improved efforts to tackle suicide and self-harm. I appreciate the Committee's important contribution to those complex issues.

Suicide represents a tragic loss of life that leaves a terrible legacy for families and communities. It can be absolutely devastating for families and friends. Reducing suicide rates is, undoubtedly, a tough challenge for Government and for local communities. However, we must be prepared to meet that challenge.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in suicide rates in Northern Ireland. In 2006, 291 deaths by suicide were recorded. That is almost double the number of deaths that were recorded annually in 2003 and 2004. Thankfully, in 2007, rates fell for the first time in three years: 242 suicides were recorded, which represents a 17% fall from 2006. Although I welcome that reduction, 242 deaths are still far too many. Northern Ireland's rates remain above the UK average. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that suicide rates have fluctuated greatly in the past. It is too early to determine whether that fall indicates a long-term downward trend in local suicide statistics.

The suicide prevention strategy, entitled 'Protect Life: A Shared Vision' was published in October 2006. Its target is a 15% reduction in suicide rates in Northern Ireland by 2011. That means that the Department aims to drive down rates from an average of 12.6 deaths per 100,000 of the population. That is, indeed, a tough challenge, particularly following the unprecedented rise in 2006, when the rate exceeded 17 deaths per 100,000 people.

We simply cannot allow so many people to continue to be consumed by the tragedy of suicide.

It is also important to acknowledge that in Northern Ireland there are substantial regional and demographic variations in the rates. In 2007, one in five people registered as taking their own lives was a young man aged between 16 and 34. Suicide levels remain disproportionately high in areas of greatest economic and social need.

Implementation of the suicide prevention strategy will therefore continue on the twin tracks of actions targeted at high-risk groups alongside broader population-wide approaches. Targeted actions are focused on those most at risk or in need of most support, such as young males; people who self-harm; those bereaved by suicide; and people in the prison system. Population-wide approaches recognise that suicide is a regional problem that affects people from all areas and backgrounds, and of all ages. The new regional crisis response telephone helpline service, Lifeline, is one of the population-wide actions.

Rates of self-harm among young people are also very worrying, with around 4,500 hospital admissions each year. That is likely to represent only the tip of the problem; we need better information to obtain a clearer picture of the scale of the problem. A pilot self-harm service project at the Mater Hospital and a self-harm mentoring project based at Altnagelvin accident and emergency department will provide valuable learning about the provision of self-harm services.

Overall, a great deal of work has already been undertaken, but there is much more that we all can do to reduce suicide and self-harm levels, and provide help and support for those who need it most. High levels of suicide and self-harm, particularly among young people, are a manifestation of poor mental health. In Northern Ireland, up to one in five people are believed to have experienced a mental-health problem during their life. It is estimated that Northern Ireland's mental-health needs are at least 25% greater than those of England.

If we want to make serious inroads into tackling the scourge of suicide and self-harm, particularly among young people, we must become better at looking after people's mental health. Suicide must be tackled as part of the wider strategy to improve mental health and

well-being. That is why I fought so hard to secure significant additional funding for mental-health services in the final Budget allocation. This year, recurring funding for mental-health services will total £187 million. In addition, mental-health services will benefit from an extra investment of £46 million over the next three years.

In fact, by 2010-11, there will be an increase of more than 12% on current spending. Although that falls short of what the Bamford Review said was needed, it will enable me to implement a number of its key recommendations, including a maximum 13-week wait for psychotherapy by 2010; a 20% reduction in admissions to mental-health hospitals; an extra 200 staff for community mental-health teams; and allow us to recruit additional psychotherapists to improve access to psychotherapy interventions.

In tackling most major issues in society joined-up thinking and action is required. Such an approach is absolutely essential in tackling suicide. Through partnership working with all the key groups and agencies, my Department will continue to tackle suicide by driving forward implementation of the suicide prevention strategy and action plan. Government, the statutory sector, the voluntary and community sector and the private sector all have an input. Schools and colleges, charities, workplaces, hospitals, GP services, police and justice services, youth services, faith groups, care services, community groups and families must be involved.

In this financial year, a total investment of £6.5 million has been made available to implement the suicide prevention strategy. An additional £7.1 million invested in mental-health services for the development of community mental-health teams and psychological-therapy services will also help in the fight to reduce levels of suicide and self-harm.

I stress that, in our efforts to prevent suicide, partnership is not just an aspiration. Some £3 million of the total investment in suicide prevention is available for community initiatives and support services, either through the community support package or for wrap-around services to support the new regional helpline.

The suicide strategy implementation body, which oversees the implementation of the strategy, comprises a broad range of interests. Also at Government level, a ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention has been established to ensure that a cross-departmental response is in place and can be effective. I intend to arrange another meeting of that group to further consider how Departments can best contribute to the implementation of the Protect Life strategy and how cross-departmental working can be improved.

The Department owes a huge debt of gratitude to families who have been bereaved by suicide and to local community groups for the courage and determination

that they have displayed to ensure that the issue has remained a key focus for health and social care. The active participation of families and community groups will continue to be integral to the implementation, review and evaluation of the strategy.

Implementation of the strategy is well under way. For example, the Lifeline 24/7 crisis-response helpline is already dealing with almost 200 calls a day from people across Northern Ireland. A depression-awareness training programme for GPs, a self-harm mentoring scheme, joint North/South public information campaigns, a crisis-intervention service and community support package funding, with associated local implementation plans, are in place.

I launched the Lifeline service at the start of May. I am aware of the concern over the decision to establish a regional service ahead of full evaluation of the north and west Belfast pilot helpline. I took that decision because of the high volume of calls that the helpline received and because clear demand emerged from elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Around half of the calls that the pilot helpline received came from outside north and west Belfast. However, I assure the House that the findings of the review of the pilot helpline will inform evaluation of the new service.

I was lobbied strongly on the issue, and I was determined to get the helpline into operation. It seemed that it was necessary by January 2008, not least because there is always a surge in the incidence of suicide after Christmas. I took the view that lives were at stake and, given the benefits of the pilot project, I was putting lives first by getting the telephone line into operation. The evaluation is ongoing, and we will learn from it, but I make no apology for launching the helpline. Lifeline operated without significant publicity from the end of January to the end of April, and, by the time of the launch, it was dealing with almost 200 calls a day, which clearly demonstrates the need and demand for that type of regional service.

As the public awareness campaign gears up, it can be expected that greater numbers of people will use Lifeline. It is essential to have sufficient capacity in the system to deal with the referrals from the helpline, and work with the trusts is ongoing to ensure that referrals can be dealt with and that services are provided within the targeted timescales.

Half of GPs have undertaken specialised depression-awareness training, which means that coverage has reached 80% of GP practices. Three television adverts have been aired to promote awareness and understanding of mental health. A fourth advert is currently being worked on, and additional funds have been made available to improve the trusts' crisis-intervention services. Work is ongoing to staff those teams up so that 24/7 cover can be provided.

Suicide and self-harm respect no borders, and many of the issues that we face will also be challenges for our colleagues in the rest of the UK and in the Republic of Ireland. I will continue to ensure that we share learning and best practice with our close neighbours through arrangements such as the North/South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the five nations working group on suicide. That learning will be reflected in local approaches and in all-island actions that are developed through the suicide prevention strategy.

2.00 pm

I am increasingly concerned about the Internet's impact on vulnerable people, especially at times of crisis in their lives. I have met key stakeholders from the Internet industry, and I will continue to challenge the industry to take seriously the need to protect young people from the Internet's worst excesses.

I met Dr Tanya Byron before the publication of her report on the risks to children from exposure to the Internet and video games. Her recommendations for a UK council on child Internet safety have been accepted by the Prime Minister. The council will lead the development of a UK strategy for child Internet safety, and it is essential that Northern Ireland is properly represented on it, because that will provide our opportunity to influence and shape the strategy and to press for tougher regulation.

The media also have an important role to play in helping to prevent suicide and self-harm and in promoting positive mental health and well-being. I met local editors about that matter, and they continue to report responsibly and sensitively about suicide and self-harm.

Our colleagues in the Irish Republic have established a media-monitoring system known as Headline, and the Health Promotion Agency is considering that initiative's impact and will advise the Department accordingly.

Many factors can increase the potential for suicide, not least of which is the misuse of alcohol and drugs, which reduce inhibitions and increase the likelihood of behaviour that one might otherwise be able to resist. That includes the risk of self-harm or suicide; as I said previously, American research found that one in three adolescents who attempted suicide were intoxicated at the time.

Tackling and preventing alcohol and drug misuse is a major focus for my Department. A long-term strategy is in place to reduce alcohol and drug misuse, and I believe that that will have an impact on reducing adolescent suicide and self-harm rates.

Suicide and self-harm are highly complex matters, and the scale of the problem is daunting. I do not have all the answers — no individual or group has. Arrangements to evaluate the suicide prevention strategy are

progressing, and evaluation will provide further information about the most effective approaches and actions. However, at this stage, it is also clear that suicide and self-harm are collective problems. Health and social services cannot tackle such issues alone — a collective approach is the only one that will work.

It is important to learn from the Committee's report and from this debate. As the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I will ensure that that informs the drive to reduce suicide and self-harm.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The debate on this emotive and sensitive subject has been full and beneficial. Suicide and self-harm affects all but a few communities. I thank all Members who spoke in the debate, and I particularly thank the groups and organisations that helped and informed the Committee in its efforts to produce today's final report. I also thank the Minister for his response.

I do not propose to summarise everything that Members said on the subject; rather, I will focus on the Minister's initial response to the report's recommendations. First, however, I will emphasise some points that were raised by Members. The 'Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm' is the result of the Committee's thorough examination of many matters relating to suicide and self-harm. Although the Committee cannot claim that the report is an exhaustive consideration of the subject, it contains 26 wide-ranging recommendations, most, if not all, of which were mentioned in the debate. I will highlight a few general matters raised by Members.

The Committee Chairperson dealt with the overall strategic approach and the structures that would be necessary to implement the strategy. The dual-population and targeted approach is welcome; however, the Committee wants the strategy to have a greater focus on the needs of people who live in rural areas. I come from a rural community, and I feel strongly about that.

The Committee received a presentation from the Niamh Louise Foundation, which pointed out that one size does not necessarily fit all, and that a different approach may be required in rural areas. Niamh Louise's parents set up the foundation to address that problem because, when Niamh lost her life, there was nowhere for them to turn to for support in their local area. As a result, they established their excellent group, which provides support for people in rural areas.

The stigma attached to mental-health issues has been mentioned, particularly in respect of suicide. As some Members have mentioned, the true levels of suicide may be higher because not all suicides are recorded due to perceived shame or disgrace. There

must be a culture change in attitudes, and it is the responsibility of the Assembly to achieve that.

Some Members referred to self-harm, which — as the Committee has seen — is a strong predictor of future suicide attempts. The BMA told the Committee that 51% of suicide victims self-harm before their death. The 2004 guidelines by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence on dealing with self-harm identified the need for a psycho-social assessment of those who self-harm. The Committee is concerned about the lack of availability of that type of assessment.

As the Minister and some Members mentioned, the Committee visited a project on self-harm based at the Mater Hospital, which we were all impressed by. The project is based on the premise that a comprehensive psychiatric assessment is therapeutic and halves the likelihood of repeated self-harm. The Committee calls for that pilot exercise to be urgently evaluated and extended to other areas.

Families Forum recommended a card-before-you-leave system to the Committee to tackle self-harm. The importance of such a system was repeatedly advocated to help those who are vulnerable and who seek emotional support. It is cruel to discharge someone who is at risk of suicide or self-harm without a definite follow-up appointment, and the Committee strongly recommends the urgent introduction of a card-before-you-leave system. Many of the groups that visited the Committee described that system as a much-needed lifeline for people when they leave hospital.

The issue of funding was also raised repeatedly. Although the overall level of funding compares reasonably well with Scotland and the Twenty-six Counties on a per capita basis, it must be used to its maximum potential. The Committee calls for funding to be ring-fenced for a number of years to sustain and implement the suicide-prevention strategy. We also recognise that full transparency and accountability on the use of funding is vital. The uncertainty that surrounds the funding for community groups that provide services was raised with the Committee on many occasions. We want more certainty and sustainability for those groups.

The Chairperson highlighted our concerns on the introduction of the helpline before the pilot scheme has been evaluated. Although I accept the Minister's point, the Committee felt that it was wrong to establish the helpline in the absence of that evaluation. When the regional helpline was launched, the Minister said that it would cost around £3.5 million a year to run, which is a substantial chunk of the overall funding and should be investigated — it cannot be right to spend over half the total budget for suicide on a helpline. The provision of a helpline is vital, but the Minister must investigate

other ways to fund it, which could include sponsorship from mobile-phone companies or other businesses.

It has been highlighted during the debate that suicide is a worldwide problem. That assertion is supported by World Health Organization figures, which estimate that one person in the world dies from suicide every 40 seconds and that one person attempts suicide every three seconds.

As well as the difficulties in the correct recording of suicides, there are other complications in measuring rates of suicide accurately. The Committee notes that there is often a delay between a death and the time that it is registered, because all sudden deaths are referred to the coroner for investigation. The targets of the strategy were a 10% reduction in the suicide rate by 2008, and a further 5% reduction by 2011.

The Committee listened to arguments for and against target setting, and has acknowledged the difficulties involved in measuring suicide rates accurately. The Committee recognises that the current targets are challenging and urges the Minister to review the figures for this year. The Committee also asks the Minister to consider setting targets for a reduction in the number of self-harm incidents.

Several Members referred to sporting icons, and how we can better equip young people with the skills they need to cope with problems and crises in their lives. That matter is dealt with in the report — and Dr Deeny and a number of other Members referred to it today. It is also well recognised that young people — particularly young men — are reluctant to talk about their feelings. During the Committee's visit to Scotland, we learned how major sporting celebrities there have been used to highlight the issue successfully and to encourage young men to talk and seek help.

That example could usefully be followed here. Many heroes in different sports could be used at a local level, including GAA players, soccer stars and rugby players. The annual North West 200 has just taken place, which draws one of the biggest crowds of the sporting year. Unfortunately it has been in the headlines for the wrong reasons this year due to the tragic death of Robert Dunlop. I urge the Minister to explore how sporting occasions such as that could be used to raise awareness of suicide at a local level, and to encourage young people to talk openly about their feelings.

I welcome the Minister's response to the Committee's report, and his willingness to take forward the Protect Life strategy. The Committee's overall findings were that the right strategy has been adopted, but that there are ways in which it could be improved to tackle suicide in a more robust way. Many respondents to the Committee's inquiry were positive about the way in which the Minister is addressing the issue. The Committee welcomed the action that the Minister has

taken in engaging with local media about more responsible reporting of suicide and related issues — that is a very important matter.

The Committee, and the witnesses who gave evidence to it, were concerned about the use of the Internet and particularly about social networking sites that are used to promote and encourage suicide, and welcomed the initiative taken by the Minister to meet with Internet providers to tackle that issue.

The Minister also spoke of moving the suicide prevention strategy forward, but the Committee would like to see how its 26 recommendations will be taken on board.

Ms S Ramsey: I have previously commended the Minister on his personal commitment to tackling suicide and self-harm. Does the Member agree that we should ask the Minister to return to the House as early as possible — before the summer recess — with a statement about how he and his Department intend to implement the recommendations? During the Minister's speech, I did not hear him say that he was going to implement, take on board, or even agree or disagree with any of the recommendations that we, as a Committee, have made.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I thank the Member for her intervention, and I agree that I did not hear in the Minister's response as to how he was going to take the 26 recommendations on board. He did speak about his intention to progress the Protect Life strategy, but we would be more interested to hear how our recommendations will be acted upon. The Committee is also interested to hear when the issue will be taken to the Executive, and when a full response can be expected on how the Executive mean to act. We are not disputing the good work that the Minister's Department has already undertaken, but we feel that some areas need to be improved. That is why the Committee has suggested its 26 recommendations.

The Minister referred to joined-up thinking and the actions that will be needed to tackle suicide. The Committee has suggested recommendations around that and fully agrees with him.

The Minister also referred to concerns about the phone helpline, Lifeline. I am aware that he is awaiting the outcome of a review, and will take on board the points made in that review. The Committee eagerly awaits the outcome, as a number of groups raised concerns about the development of a project requiring substantial investment in the absence of a full evaluation of the pilot programme.

The Minister said that he does not have all the answers. We do not have all the answers, but we believe that the recommendations will enhance the Protect Life strategy. A collective approach is needed, and a great

deal can be learned from the report, which is based on evidence that was gathered from all the organisations that appeared before the Committee, including community and voluntary groups.

2.15 pm

The Committee Chairperson and many other Members highlighted the fact that suicide is not just a health issue; it is a social issue that involves wider society. If we are to tackle it effectively and reduce the numbers of lives that are needlessly and tragically wasted, a substantial response will be required from the Executive and all Departments. Many of the report's recommendations are directed at the Health Minister, but others are directed at other Ministers and at the Executive as a whole. Indeed, that is why the motion calls on the Executive to draw up a framework for implementing the recommendations. A ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention is already in place, but to be effective, it must have substantial input from all Departments and it must report frequently to the Executive.

Suicide prevention must be treated as a priority. Carál Ní Chuilín said that it is crucial that the recommendations are translated into action, and that is exactly what must happen. I urge all Members to support the motion, and I thank them for their contributions. I look forward to the Minister taking on board the report's 26 recommendations and reporting back to the House in due course. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (27/07/08R) on its Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm; and calls on the Executive to bring forward, before the summer recess, a timeframe for implementing the recommendations in the report.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend proceedings until then.

The sitting was suspended at 2.16 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —
2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Mr Speaker: Question No 1 has been withdrawn.

Sporting Excellence

2. **Mr Cobain** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps he is taking to make sporting excellence available to inner city areas and areas of multiple deprivation. (AQO 3508/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): Sport Northern Ireland currently manages several programmes that deliver services in inner-city areas and areas of multiple deprivation. Those programmes include Community Sport, Sport in Our Community and Awards for All. In addition, Sport NI supports coaching, club development and child protection in sport.

During the past three years, 11 projects have received £1.27 million through the Community Sport programme. Moreover, 26 projects will receive £3.59 million over a four-year period — which we are halfway through — from the Sport in Our Community programme. Groups that will receive funding include the Clarendon Development Association, North Belfast Sports Forum, North Belfast Play Forum, Upper Springfield Development Trust, Strabane District Council and Derry City Council. Sport NI currently invests in 33 volunteer-based governing bodies of sport that are in operation across Northern Ireland.

Facilities development is funded by the Building Sport programme and the elite facilities programme, which have pre-established eligibility and assessment criteria. Each project is scored on new TSN, tackling social exclusion and regeneration.

Mr Cobain: Does the Minister agree that sporting activity is a key element in building a sense of achievement and self-worth among young people in deprived inner-city areas and is, in some cases, at the front line in dealing with antisocial behaviour among youth? Can the Minister access funding for sporting activities from other Departments?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Big Lottery Fund project has been particularly successful. Numerous facilities have been developed

though that project, such as multi-use games areas. The education sector and local authorities are working together to ensure that those facilities are widely used by schools and communities. I want that programme to be extended if possible, and I am prepared to discuss that possibility with the Big Lottery Fund.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Bearing in mind the role that is played by Donegal Celtic Football and Sports Club in providing sporting opportunities for people in west Belfast — which houses some of the most socially deprived areas in the North — does the Minister agree that the Irish Football Association's recent decision to exclude Donegal Celtic from its proposed new invitational premier league is questionable, especially because that represents the exclusion of the west Belfast community?

Mr Speaker: Order. As I have said on numerous occasions, it is vital that Members' supplementary questions relate to the original question.

Mr F McCann: The question relates to deprivation and the impact —

Mr Speaker: It does not sound as though that is the case. Perhaps the Member can rephrase the supplementary question, because it seems to refer to a football team.

Mr F McCann: Of course my question refers to a football team. The team in question has been excluded from the IFA's new invitational premier league. That football club provides a service for some of the most socially deprived communities in the North.

Mr Speaker: The Member must ask a question.

Mr F McCann: Does the Minister agree that that decision raises equality issues in respect of the decision-making process of the IFA — a body that receives substantial public funds?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I was delighted when Donegal Celtic entered the Irish League. The IFA made decisions based on the merit principle. That is a matter for the IFA, which is a self-governing organisation.

Mr Newton: Does the Minister agree that the Olympic Games and the elite facilities programme offer potential to address the problems in inner-city areas? Belfast City Council has made a bid for a velodrome, and I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I identify a potential site at Inverary in east Belfast. The location of an elite facility in an area of multiple deprivation offers both development and associated employment and education opportunities and, in an holistic way, addresses the problems of inner-city areas.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I agree, and I am delighted that the Department of Finance and Personnel has cleared the way for us to

move to an outline business case on applications for elite facilities. I trust that that will proceed at a pace that will ensure timely delivery of those projects.

Language Issues

3. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to address the full range of language issues. (AQO 3512/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department and its public bodies have put in place already several measures that are aimed at addressing growing language diversity in Northern Ireland. The Department also supported the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Forum's efforts to examine the language and communication needs of ethnic communities in accessing public services. The Department chairs and services the forum's thematic group on language, and it facilitates ethnic minority language translations in addition to Irish-language quality-assured translations.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister ensure that all funding provision for minority languages will be based on a clear assessment of need as the main criteria?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department has received several requests for translations. The Member is correct in asserting that, in the main, requests for translations come from the ethnic minority communities, as opposed to the indigenous language communities.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister explore the possibility of transmitting BBC Scotland's new Gaelic-language service in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: That is a new one on me. I thank the Member for that suggestion. We should always consider extending to Northern Ireland something that happens in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Storey: Bearing in mind the way in which some people tried to skew politically the outcome of the 2001 census with regard to the accuracy of the numbers of those who can read or speak the Irish language in Northern Ireland, what assessment has the Minister made of those census figures, and how will he deal with that issue in future?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The previous census figures on indigenous languages were deeply flawed, and efforts by particular groups did not help the situation. I recall a headline in one newspaper that said that if you can read or understand the words "tiocfaidh ár lá", you can read and understand the Irish language. For the benefit of those Members on the opposite Benches who might not know what that means, it translates as "our day will come".

[*Interruption.*] However, sitting in this British institution in the United Kingdom, one understands whose day has come and whose day is still a long way away.

It is nonsense, Mr Speaker, to suggest that if you know and understand those three words, you know and understand the Irish language. I have had meetings with leading professors to examine how the situation can be addressed in future censuses so that levels of language use and need can be measured accurately and the generic nonsense that was demonstrated in the previous census can be avoided.

Derry City Football Club

4. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what commitment he will make to work closely with Derry City Football Club to maximise the opportunities arising from the development of their facilities, which will include sporting, social and economic generation measures. (AQO 3496/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of the critical need to improve the quality of facilities at football stadiums generally. I discussed that issue recently with the football governing body, the Irish Football Association. I also know that several clubs are examining various options for addressing their facility needs. I am aware of Derry City Football Club's proposals for the redevelopment of its facilities at the Brandywell.

I can confirm that DCAL has recently received an economic appraisal from Derry City Football Club for the redevelopment of the Brandywell stadium. We are considering that, in conjunction with Sport Northern Ireland, before we respond. As part of that process, I will consider whether it will be appropriate to engage with ministerial colleagues on the matter.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. Further to that, and given the cross-border dimension of Derry City Football Club, which plays in the League of Ireland, will the Minister discuss the matter with his counterpart, the new Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism? That Department has given a gentleman's commitment to co-fund the project if approval is given by DCAL.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The initiative rests with the football club, in the first instance. However, I discussed the matter with the previous Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, and I am happy to discuss it further with the new Minister.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Will the Minister confirm that Derry City Football Club is eligible for funding from DCAL?

There have been media reports suggesting that, because it plays in the Eircom League, it is not eligible. Perhaps, tomorrow the 'Derry Journal' will have the headline, "Tiocfaidh ár lá".

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department will have to ascertain the situation, because the club does not belong to the Irish Football Association, which is the governing body for football clubs in Northern Ireland. I reiterate my desire to see Derry City come home and play in its home country with other home teams. Such a move would be good for football in Northern Ireland, and it would be good for Derry City Football Club, because much larger audiences would be attracted to its matches, and the club's viability would benefit.

Mr Burnside: Further to that, would the Minister look even more favourably at helping out the Brandywell stadium if Derry City were to join the IFA? I remember seeing Derry City playing to big crowds at the Brandywell, and at Coleraine, in the north-west derbies. Is that not the right direction for the future? Would the Department look favourably at funding the refurbishment of the Brandywell if, and when, the club rejoined the IFA?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Others may wish to put guns to people's heads. I have not been one to put a gun to anyone's head, but I encourage Derry City Football Club to return to the IFA and play with local teams.

Support Structure for Museums

5. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the steps he is taking to ensure an appropriate support structure for museums after 2009 when his Department intends to cease funding to the Northern Ireland Museums Council. (AQO 3545/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The review of public administration (RPA) concluded that the functions of the Northern Ireland Museums Council should be transferred to central and local government. The Department is considering which functions should be transferred and where they should go. My Department will continue to provide financial support to the national museums in line with its legislative commitments. Financial support for local museums is, and will remain, the responsibility of local authorities.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his reply and for coming to the West Belfast constituency several weeks ago to see the excellent work being done by Gleann Amateur Boxing Club.

I listened closely to what the Minister said, but, given that the RPA has been put off until 2011, will his

Department continue to fund the Northern Ireland Museums Council between 2009 — when I understand its funding is set to cease — and 2011?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department is considering that. It would be unacceptable to have a gap in funding between 2009 and 2011. Therefore, if we cannot transfer the Northern Ireland Museums Council's functions by 2009, it would be logical to continue its funding until that transfer takes place.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What consideration has the Minister given to the establishment of community-based museums to record the impact of the conflict here? Is he aware of concern in the museums sector about consideration being given to the establishment of such a single-focus museum to record the conflict? Has he visited the Museum of Free Derry in my constituency? If he has not already visited it, I invite him to do so.

2.45 pm

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have not received any requests on that particular matter. All I will say in relation to community museums that wish to reflect on the conflict is that I will not be supporting anything that would involve the rewriting of history. We have a very sensitive history and there are still a lot of open sores in Northern Ireland. All of those things will need to be considered very carefully in the future.

Mr Shannon: I am sure that the Minister would agree that the Northern Ireland Museums Council needs a strategy. Museums have an Aladdin's cave of historical artefacts from the whole of the Province, and it is important that those artefacts are used to increase tourism. Will the Minister tell us what he is going to do in relation to developing a strategy for the council?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Museums Council has offered to do a considerable amount of work free of charge. That work will involve a considerable amount of departmental staff time; probably two members of staff for around 18 months, and it is something that we are considering.

Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Scotland in relation to the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. (AQO 3525/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I met with the Scottish Minister for Communities and Sport, Stewart Maxwell MSP, on 1 May 2008. At that meeting we discussed areas of potential co-operation concerning the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, including maximising opportunities for Northern Ireland to host visiting teams at pre-games training camps. It was agreed

that further work would be done to set out the mutual benefits that could be derived by Northern Ireland and Scotland, from not only the Glasgow games but the London 2012 Olympics and the World Police & Fire Games that are due to be held in Belfast in 2013.

Mr Hamilton: Although discussions are at an early stage, we welcome that they are happening at all and any benefits that will be derived for Northern Ireland from one of the biggest sporting events in the world. Will the Minister tell the House what initial assessment he has made of those benefits?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Clearly, a lot of the benefits rely on the establishment of elite facilities, which is something that we are continuing to work on and that would be of huge benefit to us. However, even without elite facilities, we have identified 27 sites in Northern Ireland which are eligible to host training. The London 2012 Organising Committee (LOCOG) is giving financial support for teams to come to Northern Ireland to train for the Olympics. We have a wealth of sporting opportunities here and given our close location to Glasgow, our nearest city in the Commonwealth, I think that we have a wonderful opportunity.

Mr Kennedy: Is the Minister prepared to negotiate with sporting authorities in other Commonwealth countries, with a view to having closer sporting ties? Countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand have close links with the people of Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: When this Parliament was originally opened, the wood in this Chamber came from Australia; the wood in the Senate Chamber came from South Africa, and the ebony pillars came from India. We have many close links with our Commonwealth partners that I would like to see continue. Who knows, maybe by the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the Republic of Ireland might even be participating as a Commonwealth country.

Performing Right Society

7. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans his Department has to consider the feasibility of the recent proposal to create a Northern Ireland Music Rights Organisation to take over the role of the Performing Right Society. (AQO 3544/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I support any initiative that will protect the interests of local musicians and songwriters and I am aware of the outline proposal for a local royalty collection agency. However, the proposal requires further work to provide the level of detail necessary to inform judgements on the feasibility of a local collection agency and any potential involvement of Government in the project.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for his answer and ask that he pursue that proposal with energy. Will he

comment on the fact that royalty collection and distribution can provide a significant and sustained revenue scheme for the arts, without recourse to the public purse?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Although that is true, people who are involved in the hospitality industry, such as hairdressers, may not be as keen as music writers. However, it is my responsibility to represent the music writers, and I will make their case in Government.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Has the Minister met Mr Richard Abbott and other active campaigners who seek the establishment of a local music-rights organisation? If so, will the Minister detail the outcomes of that meeting? If not, will he agree to meet those people?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Yes, I have had such a meeting. We identified work that needed to be developed before further meetings can take place.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that local artists lose out significantly in the collection of royalties via the London-based MCPS-PRS Alliance?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Artists, in general, lose out in the collection of royalties in Northern Ireland because many people who play their music do not contribute. Royalties are collected more adequately in other places.

Multi-Sports Stadium

8. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration he has given to the development of a multi-sports stadium without the involvement of the Gaelic Athletic Association. (AQO 3542/08)

11. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what contingency plans he has in place to spend the money initially allocated by his Department for the Maze project if it is rejected by the Department for Finance and Personnel. (AQO 3502/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: With permission, I will take questions 8 and 11 together.

The key criterion of the proposal for a multi-sports stadium is the involvement of all the main ball sports in Northern Ireland, namely football, rugby and Gaelic games. The outline business case demonstrates that that criterion is critical to the continuing operational viability of the project. Nevertheless, the outline business case on the stadium, which is being considered by officials from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Finance and Personnel, includes the option to build a 30,000-seater stadium for football and rugby at the north foreshore site in Belfast. However, the operational costs that are associated with that

option would not generate sufficient revenues to make it sustainable. Operational viability is a key criterion; without it, Government would be left with the difficulty of addressing deficit funding.

No other two-sport options are under active consideration. In any event, the outline business case, which was prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers and presented to the Department of Finance and Personnel, identified the net present cost that is associated with the north foreshore proposal as being £51 million more expensive than the Maze/Long Kesh option. An indicative allocation of £70 million has been made in the current Budget period — 2008-09 to 2010-11 — for the proposed multi-sports stadium.

If a decision is made to not proceed with the stadium proposal, the Department will seek approval from the Executive to reassign that funding. If the Executive agree, the Department will consider other priorities to utilise the money, initially in sport and then in its other programmes.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt don Aire as a fhreagra. The proposed multi-sports stadium incorporates all three sporting organisations at the Maze/Long Kesh site. In the Minister's view, is there a comparable site in Belfast on which a similar stadium could be built, accommodating all three sporting organisations?

Will the Minister also confirm that the GAA has been in close contact with his Department throughout the process and has been fully supportive of the stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Belfast City Council is working on presentations, and I am happy to examine them. However, to date, nothing comparable has come forward. If we do not plan to proceed with the development of a stadium at the Maze site, we must have an alternative plan.

All the sporting organisations have been in regular contact, and worked closely, with the Department. They have agreed a design and business plan with the Department. Therefore, the three sporting bodies that are involved have done a substantial amount of work.

Mr Speaker: Mr McNarry is not present in the Chamber. Therefore, Kieran McCarthy will be next to ask a supplementary question.

Mr McCarthy: The idea behind a multi-sports stadium is twofold: first, the need for a modern, safe sports ground; and secondly, it is part of the shared future policy that the Executive agreed. What direct discussions has the Minister had with GAA officials on the location of the multi-sports stadium? Does the Minister agree that, without the GAA's support, a multi-sports stadium for Northern Ireland will not become a reality?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have met officials of all three sporting bodies and can confirm that without the involvement of any of those three

organisations — Ulster Rugby, the Irish Football Association or the GAA — there would be a deficit of funding for a stadium. If one of those organisations pulled out, public money would have to be ploughed into the stadium year on year.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. If the stadium were to go ahead without the GAA, what would be the impact on the public purse? Does such a proposition breach the strategic aim of creating a shared space? Could such large expenditure be justified on equality grounds, in view of the differential benefit to the communities, were the GAA not factored into that decision?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: That remains to be seen. The GAA has received a great deal of funding from the Northern Ireland Executive. However, were we to develop a two-sport option for a stadium, I have no doubt that the GAA would make a case for substantial funding for a single-identity stadium. That issue will have to be taken into account in arriving at a decision.

US Visit

9. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what new initiatives he is considering after his recent visit to the United States of America.

(AQO 3505/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The primary focus of my recent visit to California was to support the work of Northern Ireland Screen in promoting Northern Ireland as a location for film production. I met several senior executives, representing such major industry players as Paramount Pictures International, Lionsgate and the Jim Henson Company, among others, and briefed them on the many factors that make Northern Ireland an attractive place to make films. Since the visit, I have held a telephone conference with the UK Film Council's representatives in the US, the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington and Northern Ireland Screen in order to develop the contacts that were made. Northern Ireland Screen will follow up on those leads.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his in-depth report on the visit, and I welcome the advent of more cultural activities to Northern Ireland. We have sent the right man to the right place to encourage that; he is enhancing Northern Ireland's image across the world.

2010 Quater-centenary of the Plantation of Ulster

10. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what progress has been made to commemorate in 2010 the quatercentenary of the plantation of Ulster.

(AQO 3510/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster-Scots Agency intends to republish the Reverend George Hill's 'An Historical Account of the Plantation of Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1605 – 1620', first published in 1877. In CD format, it will be accompanied by digital images of the Raven Phillips maps held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Those maps will also feature in the Ulster-Scots Agency's educational resources on the plantation, funded by the Special European Programmes Body. The Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster American Folk Park has been approached by Trinity College Dublin to become a partner in a major project in commemoration of the plantation of Ulster. The plantation will be the theme of the centre's literature of Irish exile autumn school in October 2010. The Linen Hall Library, which DCAL partially funds, is planning an exhibition of contemporary books and pamphlets, and at least one public lecture.

Northern Ireland Screen has agreed to part-fund a bilingual documentary series from the Irish language broadcasting fund, entitled 'Dissenting Voices'. It is scheduled to be broadcast in January 2010 and it will illustrate what life was like on both sides of the Irish Sea at the time of the plantation.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he assure me that in 2010 adequate funding will be made available to communities and cultural groups to commemorate the quatercentenary of the plantation of Ulster?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Arts Council for Northern Ireland has not funded any groups as yet, but it will consider funding applications related to the celebrations. The newly refurbished Ulster Museum, which is scheduled to open in summer 2009, will provide background to the plantation and its main features. It will consider the departure of the Gaelic lords and will present an account of the settlement of Ulster to 1615, covering the establishment of the Royal Schools, the development of towns and forts — including Londonderry and Coleraine — and the development, by the London companies, of the county formerly known as Coleraine.

3.00 pm

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Mr Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

University Capacity and Student Demand

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide a comparison of the student capacity of Queen's University, Belfast and the

University of Ulster with the demand for places from Northern-Irish students. (AQO 3470/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): There were 14,868 Northern Ireland-domiciled applicants to Northern Ireland institutions for entry to full-time courses in the 2006-07 academic year. In that year, applicants to higher education could apply to six institutions through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Consequently, a proportion of Northern Ireland-domiciled students who applied to Northern Ireland institutions also applied to — and were accepted at — an institution outside Northern Ireland. Analysis of the UCAS data does not show that a significant proportion of students is leaving Northern Ireland reluctantly.

In the 2006-07 academic year, there were 4,145 full-time first-year undergraduate enrolments at Queen's University and a further 4,855 enrolments at the University of Ulster. Nine thousand places were therefore filled.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that the Minister shares my frustration at the number of Northern Ireland students who cannot obtain places in Northern Ireland. Several years ago, the Dearing Report showed that 40% of those who studied outside Northern Ireland would like to have obtained a place in Northern Ireland. What measures have been put in place to deal with that problem since the publication of the Dearing Report?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: That is an issue of which I have been aware for some years. I commissioned a piece of work, which is near completion, to analyse why students were leaving Northern Ireland. That report will be available before the summer. The Member may be aware that a similar piece of work was completed recently by the Equality Commission. Early reports show that the chill factor experienced in earlier years when the Troubles were at their peak, for instance, was a reason why people left Northern Ireland, but that cause seems to have receded.

Other issues, such as course availability, now play a part in influencing students' decisions, as does the type of experience that students want to enjoy; often, students want to feel that they are going away to university as opposed merely to going to a university up the road. There are many complicated reasons why students leave Northern Ireland, and that is why we felt it necessary to commission work on it. The report will be completed soon, and it will be available to Members as soon as is practicable.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister inform the House of the capacity at the University of Ulster campus at Magee and detail what steps his Department is taking to assist the expansion plan there?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The University of Ulster is engaged with the Letterkenny Institute of Technology on a major project to assess what co-operation they can engage in. I have visited the Magee campus and informed the management that I will consider the additional places that it seeks if they are in economically relevant subjects; I have an open mind. I will look sympathetically at any proposals to the Department, but there are none at present. I will also look closely at the progress of the negotiations between the University of Ulster and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, as, I am sure, will the Member.

In the autumn, the all-island skills council will be held in the north-west, at which the relationship between Magee and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology is bound to be discussed.

Mr Kennedy: What measures is the Minister taking to attract more graduates from Northern Ireland or other places to universities here?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As the Member will know, I launched a campaign called 'C'mon Over', which is aimed at encouraging graduates who left Northern Ireland to study abroad to return with their skills and take employment here.

It is, primarily, the universities' responsibility to encourage more students from Northern Ireland to study here. This year, Queen's University Belfast is introducing a £1,000 bursary to encourage science, technology, engineering and mathematics students to study those subjects here. The irony is that, although there is a cap on the number of students who can study here, the number of students taking courses in subjects that are economically significant is lower than the number of places that are available. That is our big dilemma. There is a shortage of students in some of the major disciplines that are important to our economy, and there is an oversupply of students in other disciplines, so it is a matter of getting the balance right.

If we are going to meet the targets that have been set out in the Programme for Government and commit to the proposals recently published by Sir David Varney, over the next few years, we face an uphill struggle in matching the needs of our economy with the demand from students.

Sign-Language Interpreting

3. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the outcomes of his meeting with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People on 27 February 2008 in relation to local training courses in sign-language interpreting. (AQO 3531/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: At a meeting on 27 February 2008, I agreed that my Depart-

ment will continue to work closely with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) on the training of sign-language interpreters. My Department has already secured £100,000 funding through the skills and science fund, which has enabled Belfast Metropolitan College to restart the introduction to sign language course, in partnership with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. That course is now fully operational and will deal with the shortage of sign-language interpreters in Northern Ireland. A further £1.3 million to enhance the supply of sign-language interpreters and tutors has been secured in the comprehensive spending review.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. I urge the Minister to keep going with that work, because the RNID needs that type of close co-operation. Will the Minister consider establishing an arrangement whereby a senior official from his Department liaises with the RNID?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I will consider that proposal seriously. My Department already co-operates with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. Over the past year, several Members have written to me about the issue, and I have also been concerned about it. Difficulties exist, and my colleague in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is interested in the issue.

I appreciate the Member's comments, and I am happy to say that I think that we are now moving in the right direction. The funding is in place and great improvements will be made. Several thousand members of our community suffer from hearing impairments, and the least that we can do is to take some positive steps to ensure that they receive the assistance that they require.

I also want to make it clear that responsibility for the matter extends to colleges and universities; they must ensure that people with such difficulties have access to facilities that will enable them to participate properly in their courses.

Mr O'Loan: In my area, there is a heavy demand for lip-reading courses for deaf people, and many hearing-impaired people have indicated that lip-reading is their first, and preferred, method of communication. Lip-reading is also endorsed by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. Given those factors, what provision does the Minister's Department make for lip-reading courses, either directly supported by the Department for Employment and Learning or in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As the Member indicated, my Department has been responding to demand. When we worked with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, our number one priority was to get the sign-language courses back

in place, because there was a period when they were not available. I am happy to consider the other proposals that the Member has suggested. However, we must rely on the colleges to deliver the courses, which means that there must be a sufficient number of trained personnel who can deliver the courses. Therefore, although there may be a demand for such courses, there may not be a sufficient number of people available to deliver them.

I am happy to take the matter on board, and I will write to the Member with any updates, if that is acceptable.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister detail what further provisions are planned to address the shortage of sign-language interpreters and tutors in Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: We have now secured funding, and the plans are to roll-out a supply of qualified people over the next three years. A gap did exist, and we made a successful bid to the Department of Finance and Personnel for funds during the comprehensive spending review.

In addition, as I said in my answer to the initial question, we secured a further £100,000 through the skills and science fund, and that has enabled the Belfast Metropolitan College to restart the introductory sign-language course. That is conducted in partnership with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. Therefore, the mechanisms and funding are in place, and I am confident that over the next three years, we will meet the demands that have been placed upon us.

Stranmillis University College: Merger

4. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what concerns he has in relation to (i) how Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College came to the decision to merge; and (ii) the decision to merge itself. (AQO 3477/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My main concern is to ensure high-quality and cost-effective teacher training that matches the distinctive needs of the Northern Ireland system, and that ensures that new teachers have the knowledge, understanding and skills to prepare pupils effectively for the economy.

The governing body of Stranmillis University College has made a decision in principle to merge with Queen's University Belfast. I understand that that decision was based on the consideration of options arising from the Taylor Report on the long-term strategic options for Stranmillis University College, which was published in July 2007. The governing body voted unanimously for that option.

Any decision to merge will require the consent of my Department. We will conduct a rigorous evaluation process that will include the setting out of all options,

and the decision will be subject to the consideration and approval of the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Assembly.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I welcome his comment that all options will be considered. However, elements in Queen's and elements in Stranmillis either did not consider all options, or did not consider them properly.

Does the Minister believe that he and the Committee for Employment and Learning were kept properly informed by Stranmillis about what was happening prior to the decision being taken? Given that one person has presented the decision as a done deal, does he agree that, at the very least, the decision should now be suspended to enable Queen's, Stranmillis, his Department and St Mary's University College to consider a strategic approach to addressing the future of teacher training in the North?

Finally, will the Minister explain to the House why his Department has proposed to slash the number of liberal-arts students at a teacher training college with one of the most successful records in the North — in fact, in these islands — in attracting students from the lowest social economic backgrounds? The college that I refer to is St Mary's on the Falls Road —

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that on occasions Members want to ask multiple supplementaries. I can understand that. However, a Minister can decide to answer one, two, three or none. The Member should try to ask the Minister one supplementary question.

Mr Attwood: Finally, why is the Minister's Department proposing to slash —

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the Minister.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I said on a number of occasions that Members push the envelope. I understand that, and it is perfectly proper to do so. I may not have noted all the questions — there were quite a number of them — but I will do my best to work my way through them.

The governing body of Stranmillis University College is independent. The college is a legal entity and was established under a legal framework. I said that the governing body made a decision in principle, but it has been clearly explained to the college, and to the chairman in particular, that a process has to be followed.

That process requires the Department to decide whether it agrees with the proposal. A change in the status of the college is required if the Department agrees with that or any subsequent proposal. That, in turn, can only be achieved by appropriate legislation, which means that the Committee and the Assembly will have the final say on any proposals.

3.15 pm

As the Member is aware, David Taylor's report was proposed and sponsored by Stranmillis University College before devolution. That report was commissioned in early 2007, and it considered a number of options. When the Department makes its views known, it will have to consider whether other options are viable or are worth taking into account. If a proposal from the board of the college emerges, the Department must make a decision on it. The nature of the proposal requires appropriate legislation, which will involve the Committee and the House.

It was unfortunate that the phrase "done deal" was used. That was not particularly helpful to me, the Department or Members. I am extremely concerned about ensuring a strategic approach to the entire matter of teacher training. I raised that concern with Executive colleagues last August, and again in March. This is not an issue that has appeared from nowhere, and it is not purely an issue for my Department — it is an Executive issue, and I have made that clear on a number of occasions.

I am acutely aware of the performance of St Mary's University College. I am proud that such good reports and ratings have been produced by the college. I am also proud of its level of participation on the part of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

That is as much as I can say in response to the Member's supplementary question without limiting the opportunities of other Members to speak.

Mr Ross: The way in which the announcement of the proposed merger was made was of great concern to the Committee, particularly because such a significant decision was taken without the apparent knowledge of the Minister. Will the Minister detail what discussions he has held about the potential impact of the potential merger, not only on St Mary's University College, but on the ethos of Stranmillis University College?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am extremely aware of that issue. On the first occasion that I dealt with this matter, I made it clear that ethos issues would have to form part of the solution to any proposals. If any firm proposals are made, that is one of the matters that the Committee and the House will have to take into account. I assure the Member that every opportunity will be provided for that to happen.

I share the Member's concern about the unfortunate way in which the announcement was made. However, he must not forget that the governing body of Stranmillis University College is independent. It is not the responsibility of the Department to prevent the members — whom we appoint — from making their views known. It is up to those members to make proposals, and it is up to the Department to consider those in the wider context of general public policy. Ultimately, it is a

matter for this House to decide whether legislative intervention is necessary.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Skills in the Farming Community

6. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the action he is taking to develop the skills of members of the farming community who are looking for employment outside agriculture.

(AQO 3479/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I believe that the previous question ended up with another Department.

Through the implementation of the Success Through Skills programme, my Department has made a wide range of training provision available to all employees, including those in the farming industry. That provision includes the Training for Success programme, management and leadership courses, and the training that is offered on a part-time basis by the further and higher education sector. Moreover, essential-skills provision is free and open to all learners. Colleges, especially in rural areas, work closely with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

Mr Bresland: There will be several opportunities for the farming community to reskill through the new rural development programme. Will the Minister agree that there is a need for a joined-up approach between his Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I met the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development recently to discuss one or two issues about the availability of courses, and there is clearly a need for a joined-up approach. The Member will be aware that the number of part-time workers engaged in agriculture is rising as a percentage of those engaged in the first place. He will also be aware that rural proofing of public policy has been given a higher profile. Therefore, the concerns raised by the Member will be subject to considerable scrutiny as public policy, generally, is introduced.

There are several opportunities, including the Bridge to Employment programme, where we can work closely together with other employers in the areas. The Member should bear in mind that I mentioned earlier the all-island skills conference, which will look at whether the training available in the colleges in border areas is adequate and suitable for employers in those areas. There is no point in training people if there are no jobs available. The Member's point has been taken on board, and it receives priority in several programmes that are the responsibility of my Department.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What courses are currently available in local further education colleges to assist farmers to diversify into traditional trades, such as thatching and drystone walling?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I do not have the statistics for drystone walling at my disposal, and I realise that that will be a shock to the Member. Seriously, many of those skills are important, and we are trying to retain them. During discussions about the proposed Mourne national park, people asked how we would retain the national park if we did not have the basic skills available to restore buildings with the skills that were commensurate with the times. It is a serious economic issue.

The colleges are flexible, and if the Member believes that there is adequate demand for any of those services then I have no difficulty in asking the colleges to see whether they can help. There is adequate flexibility in the funding that the colleges receive for that to happen. If the Member has identified the need for those skills, I will write to him if something is planned or already happening of which I am unaware. Those skills are important, and we encourage people to develop them in rural areas as it will keep people in those areas. They also have an economic impact and, therefore, I am entirely sympathetic to any proposals that the Member may have.

Mr Kennedy: Sinn Féin Thatcherite.

Mr McCallister: On behalf of the society of drystone wallers, I ask the — *[Interruption.]* At least the DUP recognises that it has come up against a stone wall.

Has the Minister any programmes specifically to retrain an individual farmer for work in another industry? *[Laughter.]* Did I ask the wrong Minister?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member is living proof of the fact that the system works. All of our programmes are open to everyone. There is no specific programme that applies to farmers only. However, it must be said that particular difficulties and problems exist.

Diversification is an appropriate option and, following on from the previous question, the Member will be aware that that is particularly the case in rural areas. The Member will be particularly interested to know, from his constituency perspective, that when a Mourne national park was proposed, one question that arose was whether there would be enough skills available locally to deliver on some of the promises contained in that proposal. It is, therefore, perfectly sensible for the Member to suggest that relevant courses be made available. The skills concerned do not relate specifically to farmers, but I am happy to examine any proposals that the Member may have, and the colleges are flexible and are prepared to run such courses.

Conversion courses are already available at graduate level, whereby, after a period of study, graduates in one subject can convert to a different discipline. The principles are established, and I do not foresee any difficulties.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Absenteeism

7. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the protocol involved in administering the education maintenance allowance in the case of absenteeism. (AQO 3536/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department issued guidance to all learning centres on the administration of the education maintenance allowance scheme, including the reporting and monitoring of attendance and authorising absence. When a student is absent, the learning centre must determine the appropriate action in accordance with that guidance: the learning centre must, in line with its current procedures, use reasonable discretion in authorising absence.

If an absence is authorised, the student is entitled to receive the allowance as though he or she had attended, as long as there were no unauthorised absences during that week. In the case of an unauthorised absence, the learning centre cannot approve any payment for that week.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I was told that it is possible for students to lose their maintenance allowance when they have been justifiably absent for one or two days. Does the Minister agree that it is unfair to a student who has been absent for a good reason to lose that allowance? It creates a degree of hardship and is unacceptable. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I take the Member's concern on board, but the system should deal with such cases. The Department sent guidance to the learning centres. According to that guidance, absence for a legitimate reason does not affect a student's allowance for that week. If a student is absent without justification or approval, however, he or she loses the allowance for that week. If the Department is not careful, it could create an administrative nightmare, but any legitimate absence does not count against a student.

If the Member wants to draw a particular case, or cases, to my attention, my Department will be happy to consider them. However, the system should be satisfactory, because the learning centres have the right to authorise absences. My colleague the Minister of Education is aware that most of that authorisation, or otherwise, happens in schools, but guidance exists for the learning centres for which I have responsibility.

Non-authorised absences result in students losing their allowances, whereas authorised absences, such as those due to bereavements, and so forth, do not. I would appreciate the Member drawing to my attention any instances in which the system has failed and caused hardship, and I am sure that a resolution can be found.

Document Accessibility for Visually Impaired People

8. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the provisions in place for departmental documents to be made available to the visually impaired. (AQO 3528/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: On all its printed documentation, the Department advises readers that documents are available in other formats on request. During the past financial year, the Department received no requests for its publications to be printed in other formats. The departmental website was developed using best practice guidelines on accessibility. People who are visually impaired can increase the font size on the site and use Browsealoud, which electronically reads the text aloud.

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister consider extending those facilities to applications to further education colleges?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am certainly prepared to consider the Member's request. I will not give a commitment now, but I will consider it, and if he wishes to write to me, I will be happy to receive his correspondence.

3.30 pm

EDUCATION

Paedophile Information Exchange

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education whether members or former members of the Paedophile Information Exchange are automatically prohibited from working in schools. (AQO 3491/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Tá cosaint páistí fíor-thábhachtach, agus caithfimid gach a dhéanamh ar féidir linn lena chinntiú go bhfuil gach duine atá ar fostú i scoileanna oiriúnach do bheith ag obair le páistí. .

The protection of children is paramount, and it is essential that we do everything in our power to ensure that only people who are suitable to work with children are employed in our schools. Employing authorities have a legal duty to ensure that that is so, and that is

why the protection of our children has been on the agenda at North/South Ministerial Council and British-Irish Council meetings. If it were known that someone was a member of the Paedophile Information Exchange, she or he would be considered unsuitable.

There are currently two lists of people who are disqualified from working with children in the North of Ireland. However, a person need be on only one of those lists in order to be disqualified. A person can be automatically prohibited only if he or she is convicted of an offence listed in the Education (Prohibition from Teaching or Working with Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, is subject to a disqualification order made by the courts, or is on the disqualification from working with children list that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety holds. If any Member has any evidence that someone poses a threat to children, that evidence should be brought to the attention of the police or social services.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister advise whether any FBI-identified paedophiles connected to Operation Avalanche in the US or Operation Ore in the UK were found by the PSNI to be working at the Department of Education, or at any Department with which the Minister is familiar?

The Minister of Education: I do not have that information, but I can check it out, and I will write to the Member.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for her response. She mentioned that teachers and those who work in the classroom are subject to checks. Are cleaning and grounds-maintenance staff subject to the same checks as teachers, and do those checks take place before employment is taken up?

The Minister of Education: As I said, the safety of our children is paramount. Before getting a job in a school, everyone must have a history background check completed. That check applies to everyone, whether working in a paid or unpaid capacity. The check must show nothing that raises concerns about their suitability to work with children. Where a concern is raised because of a prior conviction for any type of offence, or because of other information, the employing authority carries out a full risk assessment before a decision is made about employment. That risk assessment involves seeking professional advice from the PSNI, social services and the Probation Board. Having said that, if any Member has any information that could protect children, and thinks that that information should be in the hands of the PSNI, social services or the Probation Board, I urge him or her to contact those organisations.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for her reply. Will she confirm what engagement, if any, she has had with the PSNI directly on that issue?

The Minister of Education: My Department works with the PSNI, probation services and social services when various checks are run on people who work with children and young people.

European Language Portfolio

2. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Education whether the European Language Portfolio will form part of her programme for primary languages.
(AQO 3570/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá a fhios againn ó thaithí tíortha Eorpacha eile agus ónar nGael-earnáil féin gurb é an dóigh is fearr leis an dara teanga a fhoghlaim toiseacht go luath.

It is known from experiences in other European countries, and in our Irish-medium sector in the North, that an early start to learning a second language, regardless of what that language is, is key to ensuring success. Good work on teaching modern languages is happening in our primary schools. To support more primary schools in delivering that, I have introduced a primary-languages programme, beginning this school year, to support those primary schools that wish to offer Spanish or Irish. Spanish is an important global language, and Irish is the native language of Ireland, as well as being an official European language.

To date, 65 tutors have been appointed. They will begin working in schools this term, subject to child-protection clearance. Events to raise awareness were held on 12 and 13 March for 280 primary schools. Initial responses have been positive.

At those events, teachers participating in the primary-languages programme were alerted to the European language portfolio. It was suggested that teachers could use it to enable pupils to record, and reflect on, their progress in language learning. The portfolio can be used to record progress in any language, including Spanish and Irish. Southern Education and Library Board schools that teach French, Spanish and Irish piloted its use in 2003-04.

The European language portfolio is also a useful part of the Together towards Inclusion toolkit for diversity that was sent to every primary school on the island of Ireland as part of a joint project that I undertook with the Minister of State with special responsibility for integration policy in the South of Ireland. Its aim is to enable pupils to record their progress in learning English as an additional language.

I also expect to receive recommendations soon from the joint University of Ulster/Queen's University Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies on a languages strategy for the North. That work will include methods of assessing progress in

language learning that may provide further scope for a tool such as the portfolio.

I speak three languages fairly fluently, and I have found that immersion education, or tumoideachas as it is known in Irish, is among the best ways in which to learn a language. The more immersion education is available, the better, regardless of the language being taught. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Alex Attwood to ask a supplementary question. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Attwood: Or a couple.

I thank the Minister for her reply. I agree with the sentiment that informed her answer.

Given that 65 tutors are about to be appointed and that 280 schools attended the recent seminar, how will the Minister ensure that a fully qualified teaching body will be established to enable schools across the North to implement the proposals? Does her Department have the resources to see that the plans are eventually rolled out, not only to 65 tutors but to 165, and then to 265?

The Minister of Education: We must make resources available, because language is a major part of our curriculum. In order to develop our economy, it is essential that our young people speak languages fluently. Many different languages are now spoken in the North, and our companies work in many parts of the world as well as at home. It is important that we deliver the best possible language teaching. Our provision is currently way behind that in other parts of Europe.

There are examples from which we can learn. The Member will agree that the Irish-medium schools network — the preschool, the naíscoileanna agus bunscoileanna — shows the way in learning languages.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister may be able to speak Spanish and Irish, but she clearly does not understand the language of consensus.

Would the Minister not be better — and do more good — focusing on opportunities presented by teaching languages such as French and German, spoken in countries with which we have clear economic and cultural ties in Europe, rather than politicising the issue and insisting on rubbing our noses in it by referring to Irish every single chance that she gets?

The Minister of Education: First, Irish is one of the languages spoken on this island. It is also a European language. Spanish and Irish are two of the most popular languages taught to GCSE level.

In my very early days as Minister, I recall that the Member declared in Committee something along the lines of “English should be the only language learned”. I suggest respectfully that we need to take a more open attitude to different European languages, including

Spanish and Irish. It is important to be able to speak different languages.

The programme is opt in; nobody is being forced to do anything. Many people throughout the North want their children to be able to learn Irish or Spanish. We must celebrate diversity, look to our statutory duties on Irish-medium schools and be less insulting about the native language of Ireland.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister explain why Spanish, rather than French, for example, was chosen? Will she consider any other languages?

The Minister of Education: Spanish is one of the most popular languages that people choose to study at GCSE level. It is also one of the fastest-growing languages in the Americas, from the United States right down to Chile, and in Europe. Spanish is a popular and useful language.

Dundonald High School

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education to outline her plans for maintaining and improving facilities at Dundonald High School. (AQO 3490/08)

The Minister of Education: The Member is aware that due to concern about unstable enrolments at Dundonald High School, my Department is not prepared to consider a major capital project for that school. Enrolment figures have decreased almost annually during the past six years. The admission numbers between 2002 and 2007 were as follows: 99, 90, 80, 53, 49 and 53 respectively. The overall enrolment for 2007-08 is only 332.

On 1 May, a site visit took place that involved officials from my Department's building advisory branch and the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) in order to assess the condition of existing school buildings and to consider a way forward. Having seen the condition of the school at first hand, building advisory branch wants to have a further meeting with board officials in order to determine the priority areas of work to be undertaken and to agree a programme to take that forward. It is anticipated that that meeting will take place within the next couple of weeks.

Mr McCarthy: I am glad that the Minister has admitted that the state of the building is abysmal, to say the least. She must be aware that Dundonald is a growing suburb where housing development is taking place. Students from the area will need a high school in Dundonald. The deplorable conditions at Dundonald High School, which have been a problem for years, are an embarrassment to the Department. Can the Minister give a commitment that the school will be provided for

immediately in order to make it suitable for twenty-first-century education?

The Minister of Education: I agree with the Member that it is unacceptable that any school is not in good condition. Many schools are not. That is why the Department is embarking on a programme of £3 billion investment in the schools estate.

The SEELB has indicated that it may make a bid for additional funding for work that may be deemed necessary. Any bid will be considered in light of competing priorities and the availability of resources. No guarantee can be given that any additional funding will be made available. It is not possible to determine the level of funding that may be provided until a further meeting between the Department of Education and board officials has taken place in order to agree priority areas of work, identify costs and plan the way forward. The future of any school is dependent on an assessment of its continued need, which includes consideration of its current and potential future enrolments. The Department will, of course, take into account the 1,300 new homes in the area when it considers the school's long-term enrolments.

Mr Spratt: I have had close ties with Dundonald High School since my time on the South Eastern Education and Library Board. It has been treated disgracefully throughout the years. In many respects, it has been allowed to wither on the vine. Will the Minister visit the school in order to see the school's needs for herself and to gain first-hand knowledge from its governors and staff about how the school has been treated by her Department and SEELB throughout the years?

The Minister of Education: I agree that it is totally unacceptable that secondary schools face such difficulties. I have said on record in the Assembly that current arrangements for transfer from primary education to post-primary education impact adversely on secondary schools. I look forward to future debates on that issue. Secondary schools are disproportionately affected by demographic decline. That is totally and utterly unacceptable. It is unacceptable that any school be allowed to "wither on the vine", to use the Member's words. That is one reason why I have brought forward proposals for transfer and secondary schools. I will be happy to the visit the school if it wants to send me an invitation.

3.45 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt don Aire as na ceisteanna a fhreagairt.

I thank the Minister for her responses. Will the Minister tell the House how many improvement schemes and capital programmes have been delayed while we await the implementation of area-based planning and the sustainable schools policy?

The Minister of Education: I will bring forward both those policies very soon. Members will be aware that due to falling pupil numbers — which has resulted in 50,000 empty desks — I have set up area-based planning groups to examine the provision of post-primary education. We must plan for the schools estate strategically. I will write to the Member about the number of delayed schemes.

Mr Speaker: Francie Molloy is not in the Chamber to ask question 4, so I will move on to question 5.

School Crossing

5. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail the measures being taken to provide for safe roads near schools through the staffing of school crossings. (AQO 3471/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá freagracht fhoriomlán do shábháilteacht ar na bóithre ar mo chomhghleacaí, an tAire Comhshaoil. Ach tá ról le himirt ag na boird oideachais agus leabharlainne fosta, nó thig leo bearta a leagan amach i scéim a fhaigheann ceadú ó mo Roinn le cuidiú le páistí a chosaint ar thimpistí.

Overall responsibility for road safety rests with my colleague the Minister of the Environment; however, the education and library boards also have a role to play. Boards can set out measures in a scheme, approved by the Department, to assist in the prevention of accidents involving children.

That will enable boards to provide school-crossing patrols where particular traffic hazards have been identified. It will also enable them to remove crossing patrols where conditions have changed over time to the extent that a hazard has significantly reduced or has disappeared.

The boards can assess the most suitable location for school-crossing patrol sites by using the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association guidelines. The guidelines were originally developed for use in England and Wales, but have been adapted by boards to suit local circumstances. The guidelines assess the extent of hazards through consideration of site lines, the volume of traffic, the width of a road, the availability of crossing aids, and footpaths.

I assure the Member that where a board has identified a hazard and has provided a patrol, it will not be removed while the hazard remains. Where hazards have been reassessed and found to fall below the eligibility criteria, the board may withdraw the associated patrols. The safety of pupils is paramount, and patrols are not removed simply to save resources.

On the wider issue of road safety, a programme of measures is being put in place to enhance the safety of

pupils who travel by bus. More than 90% of all board vehicles are now fully equipped with seat belts and the practice of young pupils sitting three to a seat has been eliminated.

One of the most difficult days that I have experienced as Minister occurred recently when a young schoolgirl died in a bus accident on the Ballygawley Road in Cabragh. Despite the tragic circumstances of that day, it was clear that seat belts had saved lives. Therefore I hope to complete the process of equipping the remainder of the fleet with seat belts shortly.

I also met the Mallon and Murray families, whose children were involved in that awful accident, and my colleagues the Minister for Regional Development and Minister of the Environment. As a result of that meeting, my ministerial colleagues agreed to consider a range of road-safety improvements in the Ballygawley area. Furthermore, I have written personally to all school principals asking them to help to raise pupils' awareness of the importance of wearing seat belts where provided.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the Minister give an assurance that the Department will give greater co-operation on that vital issue, given that there has been a year-on-year decrease in the number of school-crossing patrol officers employed across the five education and library boards, and that compared to four years ago, the number of school-patrol officers is down 26%.

The Minister of Education: As the Member will know, there are 660 school-crossing patrols across the five education and library board areas. The Belfast Education and Library Board has 110; the North Eastern Education and Library Board has 148; the South Eastern Education and Library Board has 111; the Southern Education and Library Board has 152; and the Western Education and Library Board has 139.

At present, there are 29 vacancies for school-crossing patrol officers. The boards are looking at the difficulties experienced in employing staff.

Mr Burns: Does the Minister agree that school-crossing patrols are good value for money? Will she insist that the education and library boards find the money to replace school-crossing patrols that have been cut in recent years?

The Minister of Education: It is essential that young people can travel to school safely, and there are many different ways of ensuring that they do that. I look forward to increases in budgets to deal with all the different issues for which the Member would like me to find money, but safety is paramount, and I have said that to all the boards.

Mr Elliott: Although I recognise the difficult issues of safety at school crossings, has the Minister put in

place any other measures to encourage schoolchildren to walk to school if it is safe and appropriate and if the distance allows? What measures have been taken to ensure that school buses do not drive past children because they are not allowed to pick them up because of some silly rule that has been imposed by the education and library boards?

The Minister of Education: The education and library boards have a tremendous record on school buses. At Craigavon Hospital, I spoke to Helen McClenaghan, the chief executive of the Southern Education and Library Board, who said that that was the first fatal accident for many years. Credit must be given where it is due, and tremendous improvements have been made to safety on school buses and the provision of seat belts.

Society has moved towards children being driven to school in cars, and there are not enough initiatives for children to walk to school, but many of our roads are dangerous. My colleague Conor Murphy is considering safer routes for children to travel to school. The issue is bigger than the Department of Education; the infrastructure must be built, such as cycle lanes and walking lanes. Furthermore, children need not go to a school that is far away from their home. My proposals for transfer from primary to post-primary school will lead to a significant reduction in the number of children who use buses because, by and large, they will attend local community schools.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education to give a timescale within which she will reinstate former members of the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and to detail the members with whom she has met to confirm their readiness to resume these responsibilities. (AQO 3552/08)

The Minister of Education: Ar mhaithe le freagracht áitiúil, ba chóir do bhaill Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt filleadh ar a seanfhreagrachtaí.

In the interests of local accountability, it is appropriate that the members of the South Eastern Education and Library resume their former responsibilities. However, it is also essential to ensure that there is no return to the difficulties that the commissioners inherited when they were appointed in July 2006 and that the stability that has since been achieved is sustained.

On 8 April 2008, I held a meeting with the members of the board who are district council nominees to discuss their readiness and willingness to take up their former responsibilities and to deliver those effectively. On 21 April, I held a meeting with the non-political

board members. During the course of those meetings, I reminded the members that they must respect their statutory duties, including those relating to equality, and their financial responsibilities. At both of those meetings, the discussions were constructive, and those who were present indicated a desire for the board to be reinstated. I said that I would consider what I had heard at both meetings and that I would come to a view in determining the way forward.

I have since concluded that there is a strong case for an early reinstatement of the board. However, a number of preliminary steps must be taken. At both meetings, members expressed a need for a full briefing from board and Department of Education officials on the state of the board's finances and on any other significant emerging issues. They also expressed the need for an opportunity to refresh their understanding of corporate governance requirements.

I agree that steps are necessary and prudent, and I have asked that departmental and board officials facilitate those steps as a matter of urgency. In addition, I need to be sure — and it was evident from the discussions that many members feel likewise — that there will be no return to the previous difficulties before the board was suspended in July 2006. In particular, the future work of the board must be characterised by courtesy and mutual respect. Therefore, I have written to the chairperson of the board to ask him to provide a report that gives his assessment on that as soon as is convenient after members have opportunities to come together. If that report provides the necessary assurance, I intend to confirm the reinstatement of the board, preferably before the summer.

Mr Craig: I find the Minister's answer intriguing. Due to their conscience, many board members could not vote in the way in which they were told. I would not like to think that the Minister would place undue restrictions on those members. Perhaps she might advise us on the matter.

The Minister of Education: Of course people must respect their conscience; however, they must also respect the environment in which we work. Every party agreed budgets that must be allocated fairly. Furthermore, an equality impact assessment was carried out on the budget, and I have instructed all boards to fulfil their statutory equality duties. I am sure that the Member is not suggesting that people should not adhere to their financial responsibilities and statutory duties.

Mrs D Kelly: Notwithstanding the obligation on SEELB members to follow through on their statutory responsibilities, has the Minister assessed the damage that the suspension of board members has had on

democratic accountability in the South Eastern Education and Library Board?

The Minister of Education: Democratic accountability is an important reason for reinstating the board. For too long in this part of Ireland, direct rule Ministers made decisions, and democratic accountability — what local people want — is one of the reasons that the Executive are up and running. I share the Member's opinion about democratic accountability.

It is essential that all board members fulfil their statutory duties. The board must act as a corporate body that is responsible for taking decisions that are necessary to ensure that SEELB meets its statutory obligations. Indeed, the same applies to members of any of the five education and library boards: they must operate effectively and live within budgets. The stability that has been achieved in recent times must be sustained and, in reaching decisions, the board must assess fully all relevant facts and evidence.

Furthermore, any board's role is to ensure high standards of corporate governance; to provide leadership, vision and direction; to be accountable to the public; to adhere to ministerial and Assembly policy; and to ensure good management.

Mr Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Selection at Age 14

8. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education to clarify her statement in relation to selection at age 14 that "receiving schools will be able to consider the previous educational experience and performance of applicants and advise them on their selection".

(AQO 3494/08)

The Minister of Education: Luaigh mé i ráitis a d'eisigh mé cheana féin próiseas eolasach — ach ní roghnú — ag 14. Is próiseas é a thógas ar an chleachtas atá ann i scoileanna cheana féin i gcás ina gcinneann dalta de 14 agus a thuismitheoirí/a tuismitheoirí ar an chosán iar-14 atá an duine óg le glacadh.

In earlier statements, I referred to a process of informed election — not selection — at age 14, and that process builds on existing practice in schools by which a 14-year old and her or his parents determine the post-14 pathway to be taken by a young person. Such an election would be informed by advice from education professionals, including careers advice, the guidance of teachers at an applicant's current school and the advice of professionals at the school that an applicant may attend in future. In order to provide such advice, and to ensure its high quality, everyone concerned will have access to information about the relevant applicant's education experience and

performance to date. The process cannot become selection by stealth.

I have always said that, by the age of 14, young people know what they like and where their interests lie, and, working with their parents, teachers and careers guidance advisers, they are capable of making choices. Candidates will choose their preferred pathway, and if that involves a transfer between schools, and the receiving school is oversubscribed, non-academic admissions criteria would be applied.

Mr D Bradley: The Minister referred to an applicant's:

"education experience and performance to date".

Furthermore, in her answers to questions posed by the Committee for Education, she used the word "selection". It appears that the Minister's answers allow for academic selection by the back door. Can the Minister assure Members that that is not the case?

The Minister of Education: I can. I have not sat on the fence on the matter, and Members know my position. I have been clear that, whether at age 11 or 14, it is unnecessary to select children by so-called ability.

The selection process has damaged our education system and, fortunately, the 11-plus will be abolished after this year. I have brought forward proposals, which were thoroughly discussed in the Education Committee. If any member of the Education Committee is confused about my position on selection, I am happy to continue explaining it — *[Interruption.]*

4.00 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Education: Academic selection is unnecessary and unjust, and we do not need it in our education system. Our education system is failing too many of our young people — the way forward is transfer at 11 and election at 14.

Mr Speaker: Order. That completes Question Time.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is there provision in Standing Orders to allow a Member to pretend that he is a Minister? If so, it is time to withdraw that provision.

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order, and the Member well knows it. *[Laughter.]*

Adjourned at 4.01 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 20 May 2008

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker
[Mr Dallat] in the Chair).*

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

British-Irish Council

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has been advised by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, in accordance with section 52A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, that a meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC) in social-inclusion sectoral format will be held on 20 May 2008.

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr Deputy Speaker: The First Minister and the deputy First Minister have also advised the Speaker, again in accordance with section 52A of the 1998 Act, that a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format, as well as one in transport sectoral format, will be held on 21 May 2008. Copies of those letters, which set out the agendas for the meetings and the names of the Ministers attending, have been placed in the Library.

Chairpersons/Deputy Chairpersons of Committees

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that the Speaker has received correspondence from Sinn Féin's nominating officer, Mr Pat Doherty, that nominates Mr Paul Maskey as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Maskey has accepted the appointment.

I also advise Members that Ms Jennifer McCann has been nominated as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Ms McCann has accepted the appointment.

The Speaker is satisfied that that correspondence meets the requirements of Standing Orders. I therefore confirm that Mr Paul Maskey is now Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee and that Ms Jennifer McCann is now Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Mesothelioma, etc., Bill

First Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to introduce the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill [NIA 16/07], which is a Bill to make provision about lump sum payments to or in respect of persons with diffuse mesothelioma; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Statutory Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on Statutory Committee membership. As is the case with other similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mrs Claire McGill replace Ms Carál Ní Chuilín as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Paul Butler replace Mr Paul Maskey as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr John O'Dowd replace Mr Paul Butler as a member of the Committee for Education; and that Ms Carál Ní Chuilín replace Mrs Claire McGill as a member of the Committee for Social Development. — [*Ms Ní Chuilín.*]

Standing Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on Standing Committee membership. As is the case with other similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Paul Maskey replace Mrs Claire McGill as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; that Mr Micky Brady replace Mr Willie Clarke as a member of the Committee on Procedures; and that Mr Alex Maskey replace Ms Carál Ní Chuilín as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [*Ms Ní Chuilín.*]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Reclassification of Cannabis

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up, and all other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. 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 wind up.

Mr Ross: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the findings within the report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs; and believes that cannabis should be re-classified as a Class B drug.

I tabled this motion some time ago, although it made it on to the Order Paper only after the Business Committee's meeting of last Tuesday afternoon. Within 24 hours of it being placed on the Order Paper, the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, moved to reclassify cannabis as a class-B drug. Although I would love to claim that there was some correlation between the two events, the more likely explanation is that the Prime Minister and his Cabinet have recognised that the decision to soften the law on cannabis four years ago was the wrong one.

It is not only politicians who have argued that the Government had made a mistake; the Association of Chief Police Officers has also called for cannabis to be reclassified, despite having originally supported the downgrade. The downgrading of cannabis led to confusion over its legal status, and provided an excuse for people to smoke the drug in public, or at least more openly. The decision of four years ago also undermined attempts by parents, teachers and community workers to get the message through to young people that taking drugs is dangerous and harmful. After all, if the Government do not take cannabis seriously, why would anybody else? I therefore welcome the announcement. Although we know that many Ministers have wanted this change for some time, it is pleasing that the Prime Minister and his Home Secretary have now had the bottle to take the decision to reclassify cannabis as a class-B drug.

As a result of the Government's move, the original motion that I tabled is rendered redundant, which is why the DUP has tabled an amendment — to allow the Assembly a chance to discuss the very serious issue of cannabis and drug abuse in Northern Ireland, particularly among young people.

Cannabis is the most widely used illegal drug among young people today, and the strains of it that are now available are more potent than ever before. Even

though the Government have already moved on the issue, it is still worthwhile to have the debate to highlight the dangers of cannabis to the health of individuals and to wider society. There is a misconception that cannabis is a harmless drug that is no worse for us than alcohol. We often see cannabis smoking trivialised in various TV programmes and films. The Labour Government's decision of four years ago to reclassify cannabis as a class-C drug did little to dispel those misconceptions. In fact, it sent out the message that cannabis was perfectly safe, and led many people to think that it was legal.

At the same time, the Government have, quite rightly, put much focus on reducing the numbers of young people harmed by alcohol and smoking. However, that single decision to soften the law on cannabis was interpreted as the Government saying that they did not see cannabis as a harmful or dangerous drug.

However, that relaxed attitude towards cannabis comes at a time when the drug is more widely available and stronger strains than ever are being used. Rates of psychosis and depression are increasing among young and vulnerable people — making yesterday's debate on suicide and self-harm particularly relevant.

An estimated 40% of 15-year-olds in Britain have tried cannabis — the highest percentage in Europe. Separate research undertaken by Queen's University, Belfast, reports that teenagers as young as 14 years old use cannabis every day. Most of them are boys, and two thirds come from the lowest socio-economic groups. Some 10% of teenage cannabis smokers who were surveyed said that they use the drug every day. That is beyond experimental use, and raises the issue of dependency. Such people are also more likely to be in trouble with the police and to be failing at school.

With large numbers of young people smoking cannabis, there are health, medical and public-order reasons why the Government's decision to reclassify cannabis as a class-B drug is the right one, and one that will send out a strong message.

There is an abundance of scientific research into the long-term mental-health problems associated with cannabis smoking. Research has determined that smoking cannabis almost doubles the risk of developing mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, largely due to chemical changes in the brain that the drug causes. That evidence came from research in New Zealand, although it is only the latest in a long line of international research into the potential link between cannabis and mental-health problems.

Over the past 20 years, stronger and more potent varieties of cannabis have emerged, which are 10 times more powerful and dangerous. Official data earlier this

year disclosed that use of skunk, the most potent variety of cannabis, has sharply increased in the past five years, with the drug now dominating the cannabis market in the UK. Home Office figures show that, although super-potent varieties accounted for only 15% of cannabis seized in 2002, that figure is now almost 80%.

Evidence shows that there are more teenagers in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illegal drugs combined, making nonsense of the claim that cannabis is not addictive. Research shows that strong strains of cannabis can have the same effect on the brain as cocaine, heroin and alcohol abuse.

A survey of more than 35 studies, published in 'The Lancet' medical journal, concluded that cannabis users are 40% more likely to develop a psychotic illness. Indeed, the number of psychotic drugs prescribed to young people has doubled over the past 10 years. In England alone, an estimated 24,000 people, including almost 9,000 who are under 18 years old, have had to seek treatment for cannabis misuse.

Mr F McCann: In recent months, several community organisations in urban areas have said that children as young as nine years old have been smoking cannabis and other drugs. Does the Member agree that research is needed to establish the extent of such behaviour and the damage that it is doing to children so young?

Mr Ross: The Member is absolutely correct: we hear stories, and even media reports, of very young children smoking cannabis. As I said, the younger a person starts to smoke cannabis, the more damage that it can do to his or her brain. That is an issue that needs to be examined. Efforts have been made in recent years through drug education in schools and community groups, and that is the proper way in which to proceed.

There is an assumption that young people will start to smoke cannabis because they consider it to be a rite of passage, especially when they go to university. Smoking cannabis is not a rite of passage — it has an impact on every aspect of a young person's life. It has a negative impact on motivation and judgement, and will, therefore, have a detrimental affect on school and university grades, and cause broken friendships, family problems and trouble with the law.

Most seriously, however, cannabis severely affects brain development in young people, changing the direction of a young person's life — physically, emotionally or behaviourally. We too often hear of talented young people who go to university becoming involved with drugs and suddenly losing interest in their studies.

The main addictive chemical in marijuana is Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which can affect memory and learning, motions and motivation, and

thinking and problem solving. It can also cause an increased heart rate, anxiety and panic attacks. Cannabis also has an impact on the lungs, given that most people smoke the drug.

10.45 am

Drugs have a negative impact not only on health but on society. Cannabis is harmful to the body and to society. Over the past 10 years, drug crime has doubled, and ever more petty crime and antisocial behaviour have been associated with drugs. In fact, the majority of crime now has a direct link to drugs, and estimates indicate that drug-related crime has cost the UK around £25 billion in recent years.

The Government have now recognised their poor judgement in originally downgrading cannabis. Therefore, it is important that they work to get the message across to young people that cannabis is dangerous and unacceptable. I look forward to hearing Members' views during the debate.

I support the amendment, which ensures that the resolution of the House will be relevant.

Mr Easton: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Drugs" and insert

"; recognises the growing drug culture in Northern Ireland; and welcomes the Government's decision to re-classify cannabis as a Class B drug."

Everyone in public life is aware of the problems that face young people in today's society. Role models in the worlds of music and fashion check in and out of rehabilitation clinics as though being addicted to drugs was a badge of distinction. They are seldom, if ever, convicted, and those who supply them with so-called recreational drugs are seldom brought to book.

The trade in drugs is a major criminal industry. Everyone is aware of the dangers of addiction — battling with drugs is dicing with death. The Labour Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, admitted smoking cannabis when she was a student at Oxford University. Members may be surprised to learn that she has taken steps to reclassify cannabis as a class-B drug, but they may not be surprised by any steps that the Labour Party might take to cling on to power at Westminster. Theirs is Government by gimmicks.

In July 2002, the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, eased the cannabis classification to class C. He reclassified the drug not because it had become less dangerous, but because he wanted to apply police resources to fight hard drugs, such as cocaine and heroin.

Changing the law due to a lack of determination to enforce it is a dangerous game. Mr Blunkett's announcement in 2002 was accompanied by the resignation of Government-appointed drugs tsar, Keith Halliwell, in protest over the changes.

Gordon Brown has now gone against the liberal Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, and has accepted that cannabis-related problems are sufficiently serious for it to be reclassified as a class-B drug. Members who are concerned about the welfare of young people will welcome that change of heart. They will also welcome the decision of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), which has changed its tune since 2002, to recommend the reclassification of cannabis. The decision to reclassify cannabis will be welcomed by every right-thinking parent, teacher, community group and youth worker in the country.

Since 2002, the use of the dangerous types of cannabis — skunk and super-skunk — has increased from 30% to 80% of cannabis use. Those are serious drugs, and they are more potent, addictive and dangerous than ever. Their impact on the mental health of addicts is devastating, and it can often be fatal.

Drug dealers are remorseless and vicious in targeting the young and vulnerable in society. Their grand lifestyles are paid for by the destruction and denigration of people's lives. Drug dealers get young people hooked more insidiously than tobacco companies ever did.

I call on the Assembly to support young people by ensuring that there is a robust, zero-tolerance attitude to those who supply drugs. There must be severe penalties for those who are repeatedly caught in possession of small quantities of drugs.

Police officers must be vigilant, and they must clamp down on premises and houses where drugs are peddled. They must also clamp down on cannabis farms and on the organised criminal gangs that are undermining our society. The police must work with community groups and leaders. We should perhaps look to the Keep Safe initiative, which was launched a few months ago in the Kilcooley estate in Bangor, as a possible method of reducing drugs in our community. The police must enforce the law vigorously and with determination to win the war against drug dealers.

If we are serious about building a better Northern Ireland, we must aim to make the entire Province a drug-free zone. The reclassification of cannabis as a class-B drug is a small but vital first step in the process. I support the amendment.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who tabled the motion and proposed the amendment. It is worth noting, a LeasCheann Comhairle, that the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' report recommends that cannabis should not be reclassified from a class-C to a class-B drug. Members are concerned about the increasing problem of the misuse of drugs in communities, and my colleague Mr Easton mentioned the existence of factories that are used to produce cannabis. The days

of associating cannabis use with the local hippy are in the past.

The production of cannabis is a high-powered criminal enterprise, and factories that produce serious amounts of cannabis are littered across the country. Those drugs are increasingly potent and potentially dangerous.

My colleagues will outline the effects and consequences of the misuse of such drugs, in later speeches. I welcome the fact that, in recent times, the PSNI has focused more heavily on eradicating the use and growth of cannabis.

Mr F McCann: Several years ago, drugs misuse in Belfast was under scrutiny, and Belfast City Council established a working group to discover the truth about the misuse of drugs. Does the Minister agree — sorry, perhaps my colleague will be a Minister in a few years —

Ms S Ramsey: The Member is revealing our secrets.

Mr Weir: Is Sinn Féin having a reshuffle?

Mr F McCann: That is it. Does the Member agree that the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on the misuse of drugs could be a useful method of receiving evidence and information?

Mr A Maskey: I thank Mr McCann for reminding the House about that matter. I had briefed him that, if I forgot to make that point, he should interject before I finished my speech; however, I had hardly started my speech.

It is worth reminding the House that Belfast City Council established a working group to tackle the misuse of drugs. The Assembly should, perhaps, consider setting up a similar committee, because drugs misuse warrants a considerable amount of discussion and understanding.

Sinn Féin supports the sentiments behind the motion and the amendment. However, the advisory council's report raises many issues, and, as locally elected representatives, we recognise that there has been a considerable upsurge in the number of drugs factories being established here by gangs. I welcome the fact that there has been an increased focus on destroying those factories and arresting the individuals involved, because the misuse of drugs is a scourge on our society. The effects on society and, in particular — although not exclusively — on young people's health, have been highlighted recently by a range of community organisations.

The motion and the amendment provide the House with an opportunity to focus on the problem. I want to make a number of points. Reclassification centres on enforcement and penalties, and, under a class-C classification, penalties range from three months to two years in prison for possession, whereas under

class-B status, the penalty for possession is three months to five years in prison. As Fra McCann mentioned, the Assembly should consider the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on the misuse of drugs.

It might also be worth comparing the range of penalties that are actually imposed with what the statute book dictates.

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

Mr A Maskey: I took an intervention, go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member may conclude his remarks.

Mr A Maskey: A LeasCheann Comhairle, I restate our broad support for the sentiment of the motion and the amendment. It is worth noting the penalties. I have welcomed already the fact that several drugs factories have been broken up and that people have been arrested and brought before the courts. It is important that, in future, we not only deal with enforcement but have a wraparound policy on the issue. We must educate our people, and, in particular, we must make our young people aware of the dangers of drugs. The problem with the previous classification of cannabis was that it created an ambivalence that led people to think that the drugs problem was less severe than it is.

Mr McCallister: I welcome and support the motion and the amendment. Cannabis is the most widely used illegal drug in the UK. There is increasing evidence that domestic production of the drug has grown significantly through the emergence of cannabis farms and the activities of criminal groups. There is a long-documented history of the negative health impacts that cannabis smoking can have, especially on the young. I, therefore, welcome the Westminster Government's decision to reclassify the drug from a class-C to a class-B substance. The decision to declassify the drug in the first place was incorrect and has not had the effect that the Government hoped for.

It was appropriate that yesterday we debated the scourge of suicide and the mental-health problems that exist in society. There are many reasons for the mental-health problems that people suffer, but alcohol and substance abuse can damage those who are already at risk. Cannabis use can cause both immediate and long-term damage to mental health. In the short term, acute intoxication can lead to panic attacks and paranoia. Many studies have shown that there is a connection between cannabis use and the development of schizophrenia. To classify the drug as a class-C substance sends the message that those risks are not as serious as they actually are. At a time when we are seeking to improve mental health, it would be wrong to continue to classify the drug as a class-C substance.

Cannabis use can also have a negative effect on the human motor-neurone system. It impairs the ability to perform tasks that require sustained attention. Cannabis is the most common illicit drug that is found in the bodily fluids of people who are involved in car accidents. To classify the drug as a class-C substance sends another message: it is an acceptable drug to use and its associated dangers are limited. Cannabis abuse also has a long-term effect on the respiratory system, increasing the chances of lung disease, chronic bronchitis and, of course, cancer.

The long-term use of cannabis has a damaging effect on both the physical and mental health of users. That comes at a personal cost to the user, but also at great cost to the Health Service and to society at large. Services that could be used to treat other conditions are being provided for people who abuse drugs such as cannabis. That is wrong, and the reclassification of cannabis to a class-B substance will, hopefully, have the necessary impact to reduce its use and reduce the stresses that it creates for the Health Service.

Encounters with cannabis are different for different people. Those from the lowest socio-economic groups are the most likely to become addicted and be affected by the use of cannabis. In 2007, research that was carried out at Queen's University found that one in 10 cannabis-smoking teenagers who were surveyed used the drug every day. The researchers discovered that 70% of frequent users were boys, and that two thirds of cannabis smokers belonged to the lowest socio-economic groups. A quarter of daily cannabis smokers reported being in trouble with the police on more than 10 occasions, while almost one fifth had been summonsed to court in the year prior to the survey.

11.00 am

We would be failing those young people and wider society had we allowed cannabis to remain a class-C drug. For many people in socially deprived areas, cannabis is a gateway drug. It can lead to further and more damaging substance abuse, and that has a greater effect on our health and criminal-justice systems.

Northern Ireland has suffered from high levels of organised crime, which often develops from paramilitarism into drug production, smuggling and dealing. Use, smuggling and seizures of drugs have increased in recent years. The declassification of cannabis hindered police efforts to tackle those growing problems. Therefore, police services throughout the UK have welcomed the change. The Government have taken a positive step, which I welcome, and, therefore, I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome the reclassification of cannabis as a class-B drug. This is one case in which the signal that the law sends out is of primary importance. We must send out a message to users and

potential users of controlled drugs that all drugs are dangerous and that their use can cause serious damage to physical and mental health.

Figures show that cannabis is the recreational drug of choice in Northern Ireland. Cannabis accounted for more than 66% of all controlled drugs seized in 2006-07. It is a matter of concern that the number of persons charged with supplying cannabis last year rose by more than 30% on the previous year.

A continuing worry must be the prevalence of skunk, which is a purer and stronger variety of cannabis. Skunk allegedly now accounts for around 80% of all cannabis sold. I am also concerned that, according to a survey, 62% of young people in Northern Ireland thought that they could obtain the drug easily or fairly easily.

The previous downgrading of the drug wrongly gave the impression that cannabis was mostly harmless and socially acceptable. That is not the message that we should be sending out — especially to young people.

Acute cannabis intoxication can lead to panic attacks, paranoia and confusion that often require users to seek medical help. Although those effects are short-lived in most cases, in some cases, acute cannabis intoxication can induce a psychotic state that may continue for some time and that requires treatment, usually with antipsychotic drugs. There is evidence that the use of cannabis may exacerbate a pre-existing tendency or predisposition to mental illness. Although there is no evidence that cannabis use causes illnesses such as schizophrenia, there is unquestionable evidence that it can worsen such conditions and lead to some patients relapsing.

There is increasing evidence of a link between road-traffic accidents and drug taking. Cannabis impairs the performance of tasks that require sustained attention and motor control, and that impairment increases when alcohol is introduced. Precise figures are difficult to obtain, but evidence from the police and others shows that driving under the influence of drugs contributes substantially to road-traffic accidents.

We are all aware of the risks from smoking. Smoking tobacco is the single largest cause of ill health and premature death in Northern Ireland. Therefore, smoking cannabis — usually with tobacco — must also present a genuine health risk. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has reported:

“Severe cases of lung damage... have been found in young heavy cannabis users.”

Members have expressed concerns about the link between drugs and organised crime. Where organised crime is involved in the wholesale distribution of all classes of illegal drugs, the likelihood of a user's moving from cannabis to a class-A drug must be

greater if his or her supplier trades not only in cannabis but in all types of illegal drugs.

It seems that one need only pick up a newspaper to read about the discovery of yet another cannabis factory. It appears that the amount of cannabis that is being home-grown — cultivated here in Northern Ireland — is rising. I want an emphasis to be put on tackling the problem of those so-called cannabis farms and the organised criminals who run them.

Education is still the primary means of informing young people of the dangers of drugs. It is important that that continues, and I am pleased that some educational advertisements now highlight the message that the use of drugs can lead to a criminal record.

There is anecdotal evidence that cannabis is used by people suffering from a wide-range of debilitating illnesses including AIDS, multiple sclerosis and chronic pain caused by arthritis, and that its use gives relief from some symptoms. It is necessary for the Government to continue to fund research in that area without prejudice to an overall stance that drug use is illegal.

We have to face the fact that where there is demand for drugs there will be supply. The drugs menace must be tackled on a variety of fronts including enforcement and education. What is really needed, however, is a fundamental change in societal attitudes. Rather like the debate yesterday on suicide, that change needs to focus on a set of positive values and on what life is for. Until we get that change, drug use will continue and families will have to live with the shocking consequences.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion, as amended. There has been a perception that cannabis is a so-called soft drug, that it is harmless and a recreational bit of fun on a par with alcohol and tobacco. However, the facts tell a different story. I note the comments of senior police officers across the water, particularly that of the Assistant Chief Constable Simon Byrne, who is the Association of Chief Police Officers' spokesman on cannabis. His organisation supports this reclassification unequivocally.

Unlike people in society who favour a more relaxed attitude, those police officers see at first hand the damage being done, and not just to the young: the problem of drug use is evident among people of all ages. The report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which has been referred to many times already, gives a mixed message. The council recommends the continuation of the policy of tacit acceptance of the use of cannabis, even though it acknowledges that cannabis sometimes leads to panic attacks, paranoia, confusion, and in extreme cases, psychotic problems, which can certainly lead to schizophrenia even if there is no direct link.

In many cases, there is a well established pattern of progression from cannabis to harder drugs. The recent advent of skunk, which now appears to dominate the

UK cannabis market, is a growing problem. Estimates vary, but it has been said that skunk is anything from four times to 10 times more dangerous than cannabis. Either way, it is certainly a lot more dangerous.

Why should society accept a situation in which mind-bending substances can be pushed, almost with impunity, on our streets and to our children and be treated as something to be tolerated? This stuff is being sold in, and close to, our schools and is readily available in Northern Ireland to anybody who wants it.

Reclassification will be a useful move if it is to mean a new targeted approach to tackling the cannabis farms and the criminals who run them; the introduction of additional aggravating sentencing factors for drug pushers who are caught supplying near schools and colleges; and more robust enforcement against possession, offenders and re-offenders.

I applaud the Home Secretary; Mr Easton was a wee bit hard on her. At least she was able to own up to the fact that she used cannabis once or twice when she was young, and has presumably seen the error of her ways — she has come a long way since those days. I applaud the Home Secretary for ignoring the dangerously liberal approach of her advisors, and going for a more appropriate classification. It would have been easy for her to duck out of that, in her statement she says — *[Interruption.]*

Mr McCarthy: It is like having music while you speak.

Mr Lunn: Or music while you work —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Someone has their mobile phone switched on. Please continue, Mr Lunn.

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

That is not to mention the case conference that is going on as I speak.

The Home Secretary said:

“My decision takes into account issues such as public perception and the needs and consequences for policing priorities. There is a compelling case for us to act now rather than risk the future health of young people. Where there is a clear and serious problem, but doubt about the potential harm that will be caused, we must err on the side of caution and protect the public.”

I could not agree more with that statement.

Some of our schools adopt a zero-tolerance approach to drugs; the penalty for their use or supply is automatic expulsion, which has a dramatic effect on children's lives and education. However, the people who introduce those children to drugs, especially cannabis, merely walk away with a profit. I hope that the reclassification of cannabis will at least make it harder for such people to profit from its sale.

I thank the proposer of the motion for giving Members a chance to make our views on this matter clear. My party supports the motion as amended.

Mr G Robinson: According to the report ‘PSNI Statistics: Annual Statistical Report: Statistical Report No.4: Drug Seizures & Arrests: 1st April 2007 – 31st March 2008’, Limavady, in my constituency, has experienced an 18·6% increase in the incidents of drug seizure and a 37·7% increase in arrests. In 2007-08 there were 2,968 cannabis seizure incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase on the previous two years. The total number of drug-related offences has increased by 9·8%.

Those statistics indicate that, unfortunately, cannabis is as popular, if not more popular, than ever. The figures also demonstrate that the PSNI does an excellent job in tracking and seizing cannabis plants and products. I commend the PSNI's ongoing efforts in trying to remove this curse from our streets. Paragraph 3(3) of the PSNI policy directive, PD 03/07, states that:

“Northern Ireland unfortunately has experienced a growing drugs culture since the late 1960s and early 1970s.”

Although that is not unusual in the United Kingdom context, it causes me great concern. Indeed, the strength of cannabis in its various forms has also increased.

Having assessed the medical evidence, I am concerned that people who use cannabis put themselves in great danger of suffering from psychological problems in later life. During yesterday's debate on suicide and self-harm, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety acknowledged that the effects of alcohol and drugs in influencing people's actions and perceptions cannot be underestimated.

I stress that I am not saying that any of the tragic cases in Northern Ireland fit that category. However, the potential for tragedy is greater when an individual uses cannabis. That observation is based on paragraph 12·4 of the report by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, ‘Cannabis: Classification and Public Health’, which states:

“The short-term effects of cannabis include acute intoxication reactions and adverse effects on psychological and psychomotor performance.”

If an individual's mental state has been altered by a drug, it is reasonable to assume that they will take actions that they would not normally take. A drug such as cannabis, which is capable of altering an individual's state of mind to the extent referred to by the Home Office, should never have been classified as a class-C drug. It is good that cannabis has been reclassified as a class-B drug. That indicates a greater appreciation of the danger of the drug and provides a greater disincentive for the use and supply of cannabis, in all its forms.

Young people are our greatest asset for the future. Therefore, we must protect them from the scourge of drugs, as far as possible. Younger people are

statistically more likely to use cannabis, so we must do everything possible to remove it from their easy access. Reclassification is an essential part of that approach. I welcome the more stringent sanctions that reclassification entails for the possession or growing of cannabis.

Any measure that reduces the availability of cannabis should be welcomed. I am confident that the PSNI will continue to tackle the general drug problem. I support the amendment.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As other Members have stated, I am glad that the motion is being amended. Alastair Ross and Alex Easton should take credit for that. Indeed, in amending the motion, they have shown that the DUP Back-Benchers have as much control over the British Government as their party leaders have. That would be a good publicity angle for them to present to their respective constituencies.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that Alastair Ross has been instrumental in changing the British Government's mind? Within 24 hours of his putting the notice motion down, a change was made.

Ms S Ramsey: That is exactly what I was saying. Both Alastair and Alex can take credit for that.

11.15 am

On a more serious note, however, the British Government are disregarding the advice of the advisory council, having put all their eggs into that basket. The record should reflect that the council is required:

"to keep under review the situation ... with respect to drugs which are being or appear to them likely to be misused and of which the misuse is having or appears to them capable of having harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem".

It amazes me that the council did not see the social problem in our communities. Although many advisory groups do very good work, they sometimes spend so much time in ivory towers that they do not seem to live in the real world or take account of those social issues.

Cannabis is illegal. According to the research, it now dominates the illegal drugs trade in Europe. Young people are now of the opinion that, because the classification of cannabis was changed from a class-B drug to a class-C drug, it has become legal. The Assembly needs to send out a clear message to our young people — and those not so young — that it is illegal. That process of education must be continued.

Cannabis use was of particular concern to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs because of the risk of relapse, and several Members have referred to the risk of schizophrenia and psychotic illness. I sit on the Health Committee and I spoke in yesterday's debate on suicide, self-harm and mental health; and there is concern about the link between those issues and drug misuse. The council also stated that users

who are heavily dependent on cannabis often experience depression. That potential link must be highlighted.

Declan O'Loan referred to the link between the misuse of drugs and driving offences. That is another issue that the Assembly has debated on numerous occasions in connection with road-accident statistics.

According to the PSNI's statistics, the year April 2006 to March 2007 saw a decrease of 6.4% in the number of total seizure incidents on the previous year. However, as in the previous year, cannabis was the illegal drug most commonly seized. Seizures involving class-A drugs have increased by 58.8%, and ecstasy accounts for the greatest number of those. We must accept that drugs — whatever their classification — pose a problem for our communities, and provide the resources to combat them.

I must devote a few minutes of my time to those addicted to drugs. Society has a duty to provide adequate resources for groups which help addicts — whether the groups are of the community and voluntary sector, or of the statutory sector — both to help people end their addiction to illegal drugs and to combat drug-use among young people. Programmes in the community and voluntary sector should be given adequate resources. I am disappointed that those programmes, which we all identify as models of good practice, continue to work proactively against the misuse of drugs but find it hard to access funding. Earlier, I was winding up Alex and Alastair; however, now is the time for them to put a word in the ear of the Finance Minister, to highlight the lack of resources for groups in the community and voluntary sector.

It is important to develop structures that allow young people, their families and communities to deal with addiction to illegal drugs if they so wish, and to continue to push for access services as well. Many community activists warn that, where young people are exposed to drug abuse on a daily basis, to the extent that it is part of everyday life around them, the risk that those young people will become involved in drug abuse is increased.

We need to deal with the reclassification of cannabis from a class-B drug to a class-C drug, and it is important that the Assembly puts adequate resources into the community and voluntary sector, to ensure that we target drug pushers —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Ms S Ramsey: I took an intervention. I am sorry, please let me continue.

We must also provide education and resources for people who are addicted to wean themselves off illegal drugs. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr B McCrea: I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board — that is mainly why I want to say a few words. I was a wee bit worried when I was approached to say a few words on cannabis; I was not sure how one should interpret such a request. However, it is a serious issue, and no less so for introducing some common talk.

I am concerned that cannabis and its use are linked to all sorts of risky behaviour, particularly among adolescents and young people. There is a connection between alcohol misuse, smoking and other activities that lead to serious problems in society. Sometimes, the Assembly is slightly schizophrenic in its tackling of these issues, because cannabis is not the most widely used drug — alcohol is. However, there is a link between alcohol, smoking and cannabis.

How should we deal with these things? There is, sometimes, a propensity to lecture people or to run advertisements — we have all seen some pretty good ones on television — but they do not really work. The only thing that works is deterrence. There must be some way of prosecuting people and imposing on them some negative impact for partaking in such an unhealthy activity. In retrospect, the reclassification of cannabis to class C was a mistake. It confused the public and sent out a message that cannabis was an acceptable drug, which is not the case.

There has been an increase in the domestic production of cannabis in the United Kingdom. When any activity becomes so significant, it becomes controlled by organised criminals, and illegal immigrants get involved in tending the crops. It also leads to a lot of other issues that are, perhaps, unintended. Such activity does not happen only in other parts of the United Kingdom: it happens in Northern Ireland.

On 8 May 2008, PSNI officers discovered a cannabis factory in Portstewart from which they recovered cannabis with a value of £50,000 — a significant amount of money. Reference has already been made to the recovery in Newry on 11 May of £4,000 worth of cannabis. It is important to stress that there is a real and present danger to young people.

The increase in cannabis production and use can be contrasted to the stark reduction in the number of arrests and prosecutions since the declassification. Prosecutions fell to a 10-year low: there were 2,790 in 2003 and 1,994 in 2006. More importantly, the number of people who were sent to jail for those offences fell significantly, from 697 to 279. A message is being sent out, but in the wrong direction.

The supply of cannabis cannot be separated from organised crime, and the idea that personal use does not hurt anyone is wrong. The use of cannabis has severe knock-on effects for the health system.

Furthermore, the increase in the smuggling and selling of cannabis fuels other illicit activities.

Assistant Chief Constable Simon Byrne from the Association of Chief Police Officers said unequivocally that the association wanted cannabis to be reclassified from class C to class B. He also said that the bottom line, from a policing point of view, was that since the reclassification four years ago there had been a significant rise in cannabis farms and organised crime in that market. He also said that it had caused confusion on the streets as to whether cannabis was legal and fuelled public concern about how the situation was being policed. On that basis, we have to look for change.

The other problem is that cannabis use affects people from the lowest socio-economic areas. We must find ways of helping those people, and that is why I am pleased to support the motion and the amendment.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although cannabis has been reclassified, it is important that Members have this debate and send out a message to our young people. Mr Easton mentioned the dangers that face young people, and Mr O'Loan spoke of the type of society that we want. We are one year into this new dispensation, and it is important that we make it clear that we want a society in which young people and their families are not ruined by drugs. I also take Basil McCrea's point that that message should relate to any type of drug. That is important.

The amendment includes the phrase:

“recognises the growing drug culture in Northern Ireland”.

I checked some statistics, which were provided in answer to two questions that Mr Dodds asked of Mr Paul Goggins at Westminster. Those statistics are included in Research and Library Services very valuable information pack. I was surprised by those figures, which indicated a growing drug culture in Strabane and Omagh.

In 2006-07, six people were arrested in Omagh, and two were arrested in Strabane, for dealing class-A drugs. There were nine arrests in Omagh for dealing class-C drugs, and five such arrests in Strabane. During the same period, the number of people younger than 16 who were arrested in Strabane for possession of drugs categorised as class A, B, or C was zero. The figures for Omagh are identical. Those statistics are particularly relevant when one considers the amendment, given that it indicates that there is a growing drug culture in Northern Ireland — that discrepancy must be analysed.

Several Members have suggested that a growing drugs culture exists, and we also hear that from our constituents. Interestingly, at the end of last night's

Omagh District Council meeting, a number of my party colleagues and other councillors discussed that very issue. No one claimed that the drugs culture in our areas is practically non-existent, which is how those figures could perhaps be interpreted, as they show so many instances of zero arrests.

I wish to return to Mr O'Loan's point about society and Mr Easton's point about young people as well as to the points that were made by Mr Ross and others. I emphasise that it is important that the Assembly sends out a clear message. Cannabis has been reclassified, but we must consider how we deal with this issue as a society and as MLAs. My party colleague Alex Maskey mentioned the issue of enforcement, which, as well as detection, is an issue that the Assembly should examine. Mr Maskey has indicated that that is happening in other forums, and I would welcome it happening here. Go raibh maith agat.

11.30 am

Mr Shannon: I congratulate my colleagues on tabling the motion.

Some four years ago, the Government reclassified cannabis from a class-B drug to a class-C drug. In a way, my opinion, and the opinion of many people, has been vindicated in that Downing Street has revealed that there is now an estimated three and a half million regular drug users, which is an increase of 20% since the Labour Party came to power. That statistic is one that the Labour Party has realised calls into severe doubt its initial reclassification. For that reason, cannabis will again be classified as a class-B drug.

More than 10% of 15-year-olds are regular drug users and believe that it is legal to use cannabis. I blame that on the initial reclassification, which has led to confusion about the legality of the drug. Some people simply do not know that it is illegal to possess cannabis and that an unlimited fine or a jail sentence can be enforced if they are convicted of possession. If someone is caught supplying cannabis, a 14-year sentence may be imposed and an unlimited fine. Therefore, there are legal ramifications.

A couple of physical horrors have recently been brought to my attention. I was saddened to read about a GP whose son was using cannabis and was subsequently admitted to a psychiatric ward at the age of 17. He has been practically institutionalised since then because of the awful side effects of that drug.

A definite link has been established between mental illness and cannabis use. Regular users of the drug have been found to have doubled the risk of developing psychotic episodes or long-term schizophrenia. An Australian study found that adolescents who regularly used cannabis are five times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety in later life. It was found that, if people start to smoke cannabis before the age of 15,

they were four times more likely to develop a psychotic illness by the age of 24. Such problems arising from the use of the drug are easily compounded and are well illustrated by those findings.

Cannabis users are more than twice as likely to cause a fatal road accident as those who misuse alcohol. Some Members have already spoken about that issue. That statistic outlines the fact that cannabis poses a danger to society as a whole.

I cannot express strongly enough the dangers of the drug. Recent findings have cemented the fact that the use of cannabis cannot simply be deemed as being recreational, such as having a glass of wine after a hard day's work. It is much more dangerous. The latest reclassification must reflect that danger.

In London, there has been a 29% increase in the number of people found carrying cannabis, which demonstrates that its use is acceptable by some. As a father of young sons, my prayer is that I will never see the outworking of those statistics. I urge the people of Northern Ireland to continue to view the misuse of cannabis not merely as youthful folly but as a serious problem with life-changing ramifications. Let us not accept its use but stand against the misuse of all illegal drugs with a zero-tolerance approach.

Most cannabis that is grown and sold today is much stronger than in the past. A report has found a link between psychotic illness and cannabis use. In Northern Ireland, 27% of 11- to 16-year-olds are regularly offered cannabis. Almost 18% — one fifth — of those 11- to 16-year-olds will take it. Those are horrendous statistics. Were a class of 30 pupils to be in the Chamber, six of them would have tried cannabis in the past year.

What are the effects? Research conducted at Queen's University Belfast shows that young users are more likely to be away from their families in the evenings and involved in antisocial behaviour. Furthermore, they are more likely to have bad communication skills with their family and be disaffected with school. It is clear that that is not what people want from, or for, their children. I had a good friend during my school days who was very athletic. Drugs ultimately changed his life and destroyed his ability.

Hauls of cannabis have recently been discovered. Indeed, a short time ago, 20 bin bags of heads and leaves and 450 cannabis plants were discovered at a house that had been turned into a cannabis factory, with the lights and the ventilation system adapted accordingly.

Members have commented on the Association of Chief Police Officers, which is clearly concerned about the fact that cannabis is not harmless. The association has made its dangers clear to the community and its advice should be listened to and adhered to.

Given that the side effects of cannabis are worrying and dangerous, doctors do not prescribe it to their multiple sclerosis patients.

Cannabis use is dangerous to individuals and to society as a whole. Its use and possession are illegal and cannot and will not be tolerated.

Mr Ross: Mr Shannon's last remarks were perhaps the most important that we have heard — cannabis is dangerous not just to individuals, but to society as a whole.

Mr Alex Maskey referred to the fact that the official report on the matter recommended that cannabis should not be reclassified. However, reclassifying cannabis to a class-B drug was the right decision that sent out a clear message about the harm that the drug can cause. As Mr Maskey said, the report recommended that the drug should not be reclassified, even though it conceded that regular cannabis use can have real and significant effects on mental health. The report also stated that the higher content of THC, which is the ingredient that causes the so-called buzz, has made modern forms of the drug far more potent than those that were used in the 1960s.

The scourge of drugs in our society has led to real social problems, including the rise of antisocial behaviour and underachievement among our young people, particularly those in socially deprived areas. The Government have sent out a powerful message by reclassifying cannabis. In the words of the Prime Minister:

“cannabis is not only illegal, it's unacceptable.”

The Labour Government's policy on drugs has not been good. However, as Mr Lunn said, at least they have now decided that they have had enough of reviews — they have stopped dithering and have made the right decision.

As I said, not only politicians wanted the change in classification; the Association of Chief Police Officers also called for cannabis to be reclassified, despite having supported the downgrade originally. That is a telling point to which Mr McCrea referred. All Members mentioned that the Government made a serious mistake in reclassifying cannabis as a class-C drug. Indeed, their announcement a few weeks ago to reclassify was a public acknowledgement of that mistake.

The UK has the worst level of drug abuse in Europe, with drug-related crime doubling and more young people taking cannabis than ever before. We also hear worrying reports about discoveries of cannabis factories. Several Members referred to the concerning fact that some people use private houses or lofts in houses to grow their own cannabis.

It is important to note that all Members referred to the impact that cannabis has on young people. The drug

culture among young people is the most important issue in this debate. My colleague Alex Easton said that celebrity lifestyles influence young people. Drug taking — particularly taking cannabis — is seen as “cool” and something that trendy people do. That is a powerful message. We recognise that the Government's decision four years ago was also a powerful message. However, I hope that their decision to reclassify cannabis, and the message that the Assembly sends, will prove to be as powerful.

Mr Easton also talked about the impact that drug dealers have. It is important that we clamp down on drug pushers and that the police apprehend those who harm our society. We want harsher penalties to be introduced. It is interesting to note that when cannabis was reclassified as a class-C drug, most people who were caught with it were not punished. The cannabis was simply confiscated, and no criminal proceedings were brought against those people.

Mr Maskey said that given that the drug is now more potent and dangerous than ever, the debate on the matter has moved away from the image of cannabis-smoking hippies. When considering some of the reports that have been produced, it is important to recognise the fact that cannabis is far more potent than it has been in the past. I said earlier that cannabis is now 10 times stronger and 10 times more dangerous than it was previously. Mr Maskey also talked about the drug gangs and factories around Northern Ireland, and he welcomed the police crackdown on those who are involved. He suggested that the introduction of tougher penalties should be considered.

John McCallister indicated that the Government made a mistake four years ago. He mentioned the debate that was held yesterday on self-harm and suicide. He also spoke about the link between cannabis and mental-health problems, including motor-neurone problems. Interestingly, he also mentioned drink driving and drug driving. Problems that they cause have been increasing, especially when evidence suggests that the effect of cannabis and drug use can last much longer than the effects of alcohol — in some cases, upwards of 24 hours. It is important that that is highlighted.

Declan O'Loan spoke about the powerful message that the Assembly can send out. He also referred to the powerful message that the Government sent out by reclassifying cannabis. Indeed, several Members made that point.

Declan O'Loan also referred to the fact that skunk now makes up around 80% of the cannabis market — a point made by other Members. He said that the drug was readily available, and that that was worrying. That goes back to a point that Mr McCann made earlier about the drug being more available, and that young

people can get hold of it in schools — not only in secondary and grammar, but in primary schools — and that is particularly worrying. He referred to the need for a joined-up approach between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and other agencies.

Trevor Lunn noted the mixed message in the report and how the advisory council wanted to keep cannabis classified as a class-C drug but also referred to the mental-health and other problems associated with the drug, which I referred to at the beginning of my winding-up speech. He also spoke of the progression of young people using so-called soft drugs moving on to harder drugs. Although some commentators say that there is no link, it is clear that young people who start taking cannabis — and who get into the habit of taking cannabis — are more likely to experiment with other drugs and move on to ecstasy, LSD or other harder drugs, and that is a real problem.

My colleague George Robinson spoke of the local impact in Limavady, and the number of arrests and drug-related crime in that area. The statistics in Limavady largely reflect what we are seeing in Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole. He referred to the different types of stronger drugs, how dangerous they are and the impact that they have on the mind.

Sue Ramsey said that I should take credit for making the Prime Minister bow his knee to this Assembly or to me personally. However, she said that we are dealing with a serious issue, and it is important that we get that message across. Cannabis is a serious issue, and it has a serious impact not only on society — as Ms Ramsey said — but on an individual's health. She referred to the social impact of the drug, and that is important. She also said that it was wrong to declassify the drug four years ago, and referred to yesterday's debate and the link with depression.

Ms S Ramsey: The Member has taken on board my point that he should not run away from the fact that he may be putting the British Government under pressure. Will he take on board my point that he should have a word in the Finance Minister's ear to ensure that adequate resources are put into the community and voluntary sector to tackle this issue?

Mr Ross: I was going to refer to that point. Of course it is important that we have adequate resources, and it is important that Departments ensure that the money that they are streaming into various agencies goes to the right places, which can make a real difference to the lives of young people and local communities.

Mr Basil McCrea referred to the fact that cannabis can lead to societal problems and what he called "risky behaviour". He spoke of the difficulties involved not only with cannabis but with alcohol, and that is a fair

point. He also referred to the role of parents, which is important. The decision to reclassify cannabis four years ago undermined the role that parents play in the cannabis debate. Parents try to discourage young people from underage drinking and from taking cannabis. However, the Government sent out the wrong message and undermined parents when they decided to declassify the drug. Mr McCrea also spoke of the link with organised crime — as did other Members — and referred to the recent £50,000 fine on the north coast. He also rubbished the myth that personal use does not have a knock-on effect. That is a fair point.

Mrs Claire McGill spoke about the message being sent out to young people, and the number of families that have been ruined by drugs. As always, she referred to her own area of Strabane and Omagh and the impact that drugs were having there, and she revealed some startling statistics.

In his winding-up speech on the amendment, my colleague Jim Shannon spoke of the Government's mistake four years ago and how drug-related problems have risen since the Labour Party came into power. We must look at how the Labour Government have failed in their drug policy over the years and, hopefully, we will see a sea change now. He also spoke about the confusion that was created when cannabis was declassified. That was a major issue, which caused concern and confusion, and many young people thought that cannabis was, in some way, legalised.

Mr Shannon told stories about those who were affected by the use of cannabis. Personal stories or insights send out the most powerful message. He also spoke of his role as a parent. Many parents throughout Northern Ireland, irrespective of where they come from, share Mr Shannon's views.

I thank Members for their contributions. The Assembly, at a local level, can send out a strong message to our communities and young people that cannabis is dangerous for their health and for their future. I hope that Members will unite on the motion and the 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 findings within the report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs; recognises the growing drug culture in Northern Ireland; and welcomes the Government's decision to re-classify cannabis as a Class B drug.

11.45 am

Extended Schools Funding

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

Two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

Mr B McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern that the Extended Schools funding for children and young people has not been mainstreamed; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department of Education to ensure that this essential support for children and young people continues.

I am disappointed to have to talk about this subject today. The UUP raised the funding issue during Assembly debates on the Budget and the Programme for Government, and at the Committee for Education. We pointed out to all concerned that there was a problem with the continued funding of children's services, and, specifically, the extended schools programme.

The situation is absolutely disgraceful, outrageous, totally unacceptable and reprehensible. The Assembly is supposed to promote the interests of all young people in Northern Ireland. Members argue that the Assembly can do better than direct rule Ministers and that it has taken the responsibility for making people's lives better — yet the Assembly is presiding over cuts in services to the most disadvantaged in society.

Members will have to tell those affected that, having been persuaded to adopt the extended schools programme, it is being torn down — that is unbelievable. What sort of message does that send out about the competence of this place? The programme is one of the most tangible examples of how the Assembly can provide benefit to individuals and to society as a whole.

In March 2006, Mr Hain promised £100 million for a fund to succeed the Executive programme for children and some £10 million of that was set aside to develop the extended schools programme. Maria Eagle, who was responsible for education at that time, stated:

“funding concentrates on those schools catering for children from the most disadvantaged areas - those children, families and communities on which extended schools will have the most dramatic impact.”

Most tellingly, she continued:

“This is not a short term initiative”.

However, that is not the case now.

One must question what has happened since Maria Eagle made that statement. The answer is that under a devolved Minister of Education — who repeatedly talks about equality and tackling educational underachievement attainment, and repeatedly lectures Members on how they should do more for the most disadvantaged — the budget for the extended schools programme has been cut from £10 million to £6 million. She controls a budget of £1.7 billion, but cannot find a way to maintain the services. How can she not find between £3 million and £4 million?

During the Budget debate, I outlined the trials and tribulations that people would face, particularly in north and west Belfast, if the funding was cut. I suggested a way forward, and I mentioned the benefits and improvements that resulted from a modest investment in the London Challenge programme. However, rather than increasing the funding for the extended schools programme, the Assembly has cut it, and some Members should hang their heads in shame because they have let people down.

Over 500 schools in Northern Ireland, operating in the most disadvantaged areas, are seeing their extended schools budgets cut or totally removed. The breakfast clubs, the after-school clubs, the childcare, the community cohesion — all those things are being taken away. The sums of money involved are not trivial. Often they can amount to £30,000, and those cuts are effective across all communities and all schools.

Not only that, but those particular programmes were working. They have a track record, and are of particular significance to people with particular problems. If we are to do anything in our society to move forward, we must find a way to break the cycle of educational disadvantage, poverty and underachievement. That is what those programmes were doing. I do not know why those on other Benches do not see that point of view. I cannot understand why the programme in question was not defended at all costs. It is not as if it was not pointed out to people. It is not as if people were not aware of, or do not understand, the significance of the programme, yet somehow or other the money can not be found from that huge budget.

One of the things that I particularly like about the extended schools programme is the holistic approach that is taken. It is not just about education, it is about health, social skills, promoting responsible parenting, and parenting skills. Of course, it also has a bearing on the issue of childcare provision, because we live in an increasingly expensive world. People are worried about the increase in fuel prices, the cost of heating and the increase in the cost of living. Families no longer have the luxury of one parent staying at home. Those people depended on that funding for childcare

arrangements. The funding has been taken away, and those parents have been left in the lurch. There has been no opportunity to replace the funding, and no attempt to mitigate the circumstances. We have been told that it is too late, and we can do nothing about it.

It is deeply ironic that this particular state of affairs should exist in the Department of a Sinn Féin Education Minister. We are told that she is committed to addressing educational inequalities, yet, when there is a clear means of doing so, the Minister has presided over massive cuts. Breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, and extended schools have all been described, by no less than Polly Toynbee, as a:

“great banner symbolising a social-justice mission”.

Those are exactly the kind of words that we often hear from the lips of Ministers, but mere words do not make up for the lack of funding for those breakfast clubs and other services.

I realise that not everyone will support the motion or the amendments, and not everyone who opposes the motion will necessarily disagree with me. However, today's debate is a consequence of the Minister's ideological fixation with a test that happens at the age of 11. For many people, that is a red herring. The real problems in our society happen much earlier. To those unions that the Minister keeps trotting out to prove that she has support, let me say clearly that there is a broader debate in this society about tackling underachievement and inequality. It is not about a very narrow fixation; it is about solving the very real problems of those people most disadvantaged in society.

The report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee on literacy and numeracy concluded by stating:

“We would caution against a simplistic view that structural change is the answer to”

the problem of numeracy and literacy. There are much more profound difficulties at work than the system of selection.

Mr McCallister: Does the Member agree that, if we are serious about tackling such societal problems as teenage pregnancy, drug addiction — which we have discussed this morning — suicide and the mental-health agenda, these clubs and this budget are absolutely vital? Does he also share my belief that the Minister's idea of equality is to disadvantage everyone equally?

Mr B McCrea: It does, indeed, seem that way. In return for equality, we get a dumbing-down. Any form of advancement is removed. Hope and aspiration are taken away. My party does not regard that as progress.

I want to hear the Minister responding to that issue by saying that she will find money from her core education budget, as the Minister of Health has done. I do not want her to argue for some form of handout

from in-year monitoring, because short termism is not the way forward.

The Minister and her party have dropped the ball on issues that must be addressed at a fundamental level. I say shame on Sinn Féin and its supporters. It is about time we saw some action, and not mere platitudes.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 1: In line 1 leave out all after the second “that” and insert:

“Breakfast Clubs, After-School Clubs and Extended Schools funding for children and young people has not been mainstreamed; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department of Education to ensure that this essential support for children and young people continues and to re-establish a cross-cutting fund for children and young people to fund such programmes, as well as youth services and other projects.”

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The aims of the extended schools programme are extremely important:

“To reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health, wellbeing, and social inclusion through the integrated delivery of the support and services necessary to ensure that every child has the best start in life.”

The funding was directed to areas of greatest need and was a form of early intervention, aimed at counteracting the effects of social disadvantage. School-age childcare schemes run by community and voluntary groups have similar objectives, but many of them will run out of funding next month. The schemes provide an excellent service in areas of social disadvantage.

Only 37% of school-leavers from the most deprived areas have five or more GCSEs. The average across Northern Ireland is 61%. The skills base in neighbourhood renewal areas also compares unfavourably when measured against the rest of Northern Ireland, with only 28% of people aged between 16 and pensionable age qualified to level 2. The Northern Ireland average is 45%.

School factors can raise attainment for average pupils by up to 14 GCSE points. Hence, schools are a good place to improve children's skills. However, a strategy focused solely on improving average school performance is likely to be less effective in dealing with educational underachievement than an approach that includes communities, families, teachers and education-ists in a way that addresses the causes of social deprivation as well as educational underachievement.

There is a broad consensus that intervention in the early years is among the most effective means of improving educational performance and outcomes. Such interventions are an important facet of strategies that help to lift children out of cycles of deprivation and onto positive trajectories. The evidence is promising, and suggests that well-designed programmes raise

educational attainment and achieve other, positive, adult outcomes. The most successful programmes are defined by early and intensive intervention and include a follow-through component in later stages of the child's development.

In Belfast, earlier this year, the American Nobel laureate in economics, James Heckman, said:

"Investments in social policies that intervene in the early years have very high rates of return while social policies that intervene at later stages in the life cycle have low economic returns."

There is a large body of scientific evidence that shows that early interventions lead to a persistent pattern of strong effect.

12.00 noon

It is significant that those substantial long-term benefits are not necessarily limited to intellectual gains, but are most clearly seen in measures of social performance and lifetime achievement. In other words, people who participate in enriched early childhood programmes are more likely to complete school and are much less likely to require welfare benefits, to become teenage parents or to participate in criminal activities. Moreover, they become productive adults who lead positive lives and who contribute positively to society.

The philosophy of early intervention, which formed the background for the establishment of extended schools, is sound. However, measures can be effective only if they are applied and resourced properly. On-off or reduced funding amounts to short-termism, which will have only limited, short-term benefits. Although the aims were laudable, they were not supported by a strong underpinning policy base. In some cases, schools had received funding, and had already initiated their own schemes, when guidelines were introduced three to six months later. In many cases, links between schools and their local communities were not explored, which resulted in the displacement of local services that were provided by the community and voluntary sector.

Reductions in the budget for extended schools drastically reduce the services that schools can offer. That, coupled with the effects of the displacement of the community and voluntary sector's childcare services for school-age children, leaves a huge gap in provision that will be difficult to fill without increased resources.

Guaranteed core funding is required to allow the advantages of intervention to continue and to ensure maximum benefit. Through the children and young people's funding package, and the Executive children's fund, 58 childcare projects for school-age children were awarded and accepted funding of more than £1.5 million for the period between July 2006 and June 2008. All those projects are approaching the end of their funding.

More than two thirds of women return to paid employment within a year of the birth of their child. Of women with primary-school-age children, 78% are now economically active. Consequently, the demand for formal childcare services that provide a range of quality creative-play opportunities and cross-community programmes is on the increase. The lack of affordable and accessible childcare is still a major barrier to the employment of women who have dependent children, particularly in areas of social deprivation and in rural locations. Some 6,000 childcare places are at threat of either being reduced or lost when funding ends on 30 June 2008. Furthermore, there will potentially be an increase in unemployment as parents discover that they are unable to access or afford alternative provision.

Policy arguments on this matter are strong, but the politics of it are shocking. At the time of the Budget, the SDLP raised concerns about the abolition of the Executive children's fund, which is a cross-cutting fund to deliver programmes such as childcare that have obvious connections with education, employment, the economy and social care. We were told by colleagues who sit on the Executive that children's programmes would not suffer. We were told that we were playing politics. However, here we are — extended-school programmes and childcare for school-age children are going to the wall.

The DUP and Sinn Féin play the politics of mutual self-interest at the expense of the economy, of children and of working parents. It is worth recalling their commitments at the time of the Budget. On 4 February 2008, Ian Paisley Jnr went so far as to claim:

"We are confident that the available funding should mean that no child or youth programme will be reduced or cut." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 27, p173, col 1*].

Gerry Kelly agreed with his OFMDFM colleague. He said:

"the Budget was good for children." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 27, p175, col 1*].

What is good about the present situation?

At the least the Minister of Education is consistent. She failed to seek funding for the reform of education and for school-age childcare in the Budget. Now we must hold our breath to see what in-year monitoring can do to save her blushes.

We supported extended schools; however, even properly funded schools have not universally taken up the option, so it is no panacea. School-age childcare schemes, which are targeted at areas of social deprivation to help parents get off benefits and into work, provide a vital service.

The Executive told us that the economy was their priority, yet they have not seized a golden opportunity to get people back to work at a very modest cost. Even

if Ministers ignore the social argument, they should appreciate the financial one. The cost of a childcare place is much lower than the cost of benefit payments to parents.

To conclude, some major questions must be asked. Why has the Minister not put in a bid for social-economy school-age childcare schemes, which will run out of funding next month?

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

Mr D Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé sásta leasú 2 a mholadh.

I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "on" and insert

"the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department of Education to ensure that this essential support for children continues; and supports the bid by the Minister of Education to the Minister of Finance and Personnel for in-year funding to ensure that curtailed projects in the present financial year are restored."

I welcome the debate. I commend the Ulster Unionist Party Members for tabling the motion. Basil McCrea spoke passionately in support of funding for extended schools and its need to be mainstreamed in future.

I hope that Basil will be successful in securing the support of his colleague Minister Michael McGimpsey, whom I hope will be equally vociferous and passionate around the Executive table when the issue is discussed in future.

Mr B McCrea: I assure the Member that the UUP Ministers fully support the motion and will support funding.

Mr McElduff: I welcome that, because the Minister of Education will need support from around the Executive table to deliver on such projects.

In amendment No 2, Sinn Féin has added the Department of Finance and Personnel to the list of Departments that need to sit up and take heed of the demand to mainstream extended schools funding for children and young people. Yes, it is a matter for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), which has overarching responsibility for children and young people, and for the Department of Education. However, it is also a matter for the Minister of Finance and Personnel and his Department, particularly because the Minister of Education bid for in-year funding to ensure that projects curtailed in the present financial year will be restored.

Some Members have described that bid as short-termism, but it is not, because it deals with the reality that we face here and now. It has added to the call for

guaranteed core funding, and mainstreaming of that funding through enhanced funding from the Executive.

The extended schools concept is at the core of the funding package for children and young people, which was launched in March 2006 by the then British Secretary of State. The funding package made provision for breakfast clubs; after-school study support; after-school youth, sport and leisure activities; programmes for parents; community use of schools; the creation of a new culture and ethos for schools; and the facilitation of partnerships to deliver better outcomes for children.

I found myself in agreement with Dominic Bradley when he emphasised the points that Professor James Heckman made about the high rates of return from social policies that intervene in the early years. This is what the extended schools initiative is all about — raising the standard of pupils' achievement and building partnerships with neighbouring schools.

It is about helping to strengthen families and communities through providing opportunities for lifelong learning and personal development. It is about the use of the accommodation and the school estate outside of school hours. Many schemes of that nature in the Omagh and Strabane districts, in my constituency of West Tyrone, provide evidence of the effectiveness of the project, which helps to facilitate many busy working parents.

Members referred to the cost of living, modern lifestyles and the business of assisting women, in particular, with returning to training or to the workplace. I have said that that is relevant to a number of Departments, not only the Department of Education. It is appropriate to look towards OFMDFM and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for support on the matter. DFP has a decisive say in budget allocations, including in-year funding to address immediate and current requirements. I know that Members from the four Executive parties care deeply about those projects, and I know that their constituents are lobbying them extensively about the matter. I would like Members from the four Executive parties, in particular, to translate that concern into support at the Executive table.

My colleagues John O'Dowd and Paul Butler will also speak in the debate, and they will emphasise that, from Sinn Féin's perspective, the Minister of Education is consistent and has pressed for additional funding for the projects at every available opportunity. Basil McCrea emphasised the holistic nature of childcare provision. It also meets health objectives, so it is everyone's business. I look forward to Basil McCrea's success in ensuring that Michael McGimpsey is fully onside. I trust that Mr McGimpsey will be as vociferous and passionate as Mr McCrea in his support

for the Minister of Education when the matter comes to the Executive table. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Storey: I support the motion. Given that the issue has serious implications for the way in which schools are able to operate, it must be taken with the greatest degree of seriousness.

On 7 March 2006, the then Secretary of State launched the children and young people's funding package. Its aim was:

"to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health, well-being and social inclusion".

An extended school provides a range of services and activities throughout the school day and, in some cases, beyond. The aim is to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community. To do that, extended schools engage in collaboration and partnership with neighbouring schools and statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations that are within the existing spectrum. Focus is placed on healthy living; safety with stability; experiencing economic and environmental well-being; learning and achieving; and contributing positively to community and to society.

I am sure that no Member would wish to belittle any of those objectives; each is vitally important to the development of children and to the family unit. Therefore, it is fair to say that extended schools are an investment, not only for children, but for the future of Northern Ireland. We say repeatedly that the children of today are the adults of tomorrow; we must ensure that the next generation to take over the reins is equipped for the task.

I have had communication from a number of schools and principals, and I am glad that the Minister is in the House. Does she realise and understand the particular implications of the removal of the funding? I understand that some schools have not even received a copy of the criteria and therefore have had no opportunity to prepare for a reduction in their budgets. If, as has been suggested, activities must be provided within existing budgets, then there was no need for the original package.

12.15 pm

In correspondence with me, a school principal wrote:

"Through our local education and library board, we were made aware that the allocated amount may be reduced for all schools during the 2008-09 financial year but there was no indication that it might be completely withdrawn and criteria changed. The way this has happened is totally unreasonable and drastic."

That testimony is from a practitioner who can appreciate the immense danger and serious implications of the move that is being discussed in this debate.

Although many Northern Ireland children and young people underwent turmoil during the Troubles, thankfully, younger children have had no first-hand experience of the protracted terrorist campaign. Nevertheless, that does not mean that even the youngest children have not suffered from the impact bequeathed by the Troubles. As elected representatives, we must strive to ensure that all possible assistance is afforded to children in order that they might flourish and be steered towards able and productive lives.

For too long, children's lives were hampered by the terrorist campaign. Often, schools were evacuated due to bomb threats — so much for the happiest days of their lives. Similarly, with regard to external and recreational pursuits, the Troubles ensured that investors were loath to establish businesses and facilities here. Consequently, children's opportunities were lost.

I trust that we are now experiencing a new Northern Ireland; a place in which there is investment in our children, and where our children and young people are safe and secure. Extended schools offer preparation for that; they provide a nurturing environment, with the emphasis on developing and encouraging scope for diversity. Having said that, the Minister — as she has reminded us over the past several days — is the Minister, and therefore bears the responsibility, and we call on her to act.

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

Mr Lunn: Although the motion is perfectly acceptable to the Alliance Party; if necessary, my party will support the motion and the amendments.

Members are continuing to encounter items that should have been catered for in the Programme for Government (PFG), and this is another to add to the list. This matter has not been prioritised by the Executive, or mentioned in the PFG or in public service agreements (PSAs). Although Government Ministers from all parties signed off on the PFG, we do not know whether any of them attempted to make the case for mainstreaming the funding but were overruled, or whether it was merely overlooked.

Mr D Bradley: Is the Member aware that, on 4 February 2008, Mr Gerry Kelly told the House:

"I have said repeatedly that it is for individual Ministers to determine spending priorities now that the Budget allocations have been finalised." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 27, p 178, col 1*].

On that basis, does the Member agree that the Minister of Education could have, but failed to, prioritise that matter?

Mr Lunn: Although I do not recall Mr Kelly's comments from 4 February, I will take Dominic's word for it, and I do not disagree with his comment. No doubt, the Minister of Education will tell us what was in her bid to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

I note also that the Sinn Féin amendment contains a bid for in-year funding, and I hope that, even as a stopgap measure, that is successful.

It is surely inconceivable that there is any intention to allow extended schools' services to lapse; however, I am sure that the Minister of Education can confirm whether that is the case. As Basil McCrea said, in that area, a little money goes a long way. Such services are a good use of public money, and they should never have come under threat.

There is a problem with the lack of support for working parents with children at school, and we remain well down European leagues for the provision of facilities such as extended school hours, after-school clubs, breakfast clubs and general youth facilities. The notion persists that mum will always be available to collect her child at 4.00 pm; however, as we all know, that is not the reality in the twenty-first-century workplace or in schools. Nowadays, schools are about more than just the classroom.

In theory, the funding package for children and young people offered excellent facilities that were additional to the classroom. It supported working parents, enabling their children to remain on school premises and have access to genuine educational attainment, be that through further study, sporting and leisure activities, or education in more general lifestyle matters such as anti-smoking, anti-drugs or tackling —

Mrs D Kelly: The Member is right to emphasise the importance of play and leisure in the development of children and young people. Does he share the SDLP's concern that this year's Programme for Government allocates no funding to play and leisure facilities for children and young people?

Mr Lunn: I share the SDLP's concern. How many times must young people say that they have nothing to do before their plea is accepted as genuine? The Assembly has the power to do something about that.

There is concern that youth services will be awarded a small proportion of the education and skills authority's budget, with the result that it will be as low a priority for the authority as it will be for the Department.

The motion calls for an end to the uncertainty about a vital area of educational provision, and we hope that that uncertainty can be removed as soon as possible. We have no problem in supporting the motion or either of the amendments. It is the Executive's job to prioritise matters, and youth services and facilities must not be downgraded in the ongoing reform of education. Those services must be treated as a permanent part of educational provision and be funded appropriately.

Miss McIlveen: During the debate on investment in early years learning in January 2008, I asked the Minister of Education a series of questions. One

centred on her intentions toward extended schools funding. On that occasion, she responded on behalf of the Executive. It is therefore disappointing to find ourselves discussing extended schools funding, particularly the reductions in that funding that will result in cuts to services. In light of that, I am happy to support the motion.

Not two years have elapsed since funding for the extended schools initiative was announced. The extended schools policy and programme has barely had time to bed in and get under way before cuts have been made. Some of those services will have been running for only 14 months but will have been reduced or cut entirely. All the schools that have been allowed to remain in the programme have had their funding cut by 50%.

An additional issue is that schools are encouraged to cluster in order to provide more effective services and to create more of a community atmosphere. In the first tranche of the programme, schools had to give 15% of their total funding to the cluster, or else their funding would be lost. In the current tranche, that funding has increased to 40%.

In my constituency of Strangford, I have had the opportunity to speak to several school principals on the matter. Through my Committee membership, I have been able to garner the opinions of other school professionals around Northern Ireland. One principal told me that once he has paid for his breakfast and after-schools clubs, he will be left with only £500. However, under the previous tranche of the programme, he had been able to commit the school to providing out-of-hours facilities for a parents' group and for counselling services for parents and children. He is now faced with having to cut both those services.

Representatives of other schools have said that the provision of after-school care has enabled some of their pupils' parents to take jobs that require them to work after school hours. Given that the school in question no longer offers that facility, those people now face the prospect of having to give up their jobs or reduce their hours.

Such anecdotal evidence raises clear questions about the implications of introducing policy and programmes that are then changed at short notice with little concern as to how individuals will be affected. Several principals expressed concern that that was another example of an ongoing raft of education policy initiatives that have not been given either the required timescale for implementation or the opportunity to have their success measured.

Some schools feel that they are simply jumping from one policy initiative to another without any one being truly followed through. The principals with

whom I spoke gave a clear sense of commitment to involving the community, particularly parents.

Research clearly indicates that the key factors in improving levels of attainment are parental involvement in — and the valuing of — education. For some parents who live in disadvantaged areas, school will not have been a positive experience. The extended schools programme was intended to enable their involvement and thereby improve outcomes for their children.

I am aware that there are a number of examples of the programme working effectively. I spoke to representatives of Barnardo's, who particularly highlighted the work that is being carried out at Tullycarnet Primary School. Unfortunately, the cuts in the extended schools programme means that it will be much more unlikely that such outcomes can be achieved. One principal spoke of how ironic it was that the letter that informed him that his school — which ran a successful project — was no longer part of the scheme came from the Department's school improvement branch.

The key to addressing the problem lies in departmental prioritisation. When launching her vision for a network of extended schools, Maria Eagle informed us that such schools would support:

“The raising of school standards, fostering the health, well-being and social inclusion of children and young people and the regeneration and transformation of local communities.”

Is that vision not any longer a top priority?

Moreover, I am concerned about the changes in the criteria that are used to ascertain whether a school is eligible for funding. Is a rural school treated in the same way as an urban school? Is the Department using people's postcodes, rather than the numbers of free school meals, to determine eligibility? I have tabled several questions on this issue to the Minister, as have other Members. I am sure that we all hope that today's debate will provide some of the answers that the Minister, to date, has failed to provide.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.26 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr McCausland: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do we have a quorum?

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Mr Speaker: We now have a quorum. I call Mr Paul Butler.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion is one that we can all agree with and support. Reduction in funding is a concern. The vision behind the extended schools programme has been a good one, and we saw some of the results of the programme recently when schools from the Shankill Road and north Belfast gave a presentation to the Education Committee showing how funding was being used to help children in disadvantaged areas. There is concern in places such as north Belfast and the Shankill Road as to how funding cuts will affect programmes that schools are running to raise standards, to foster health and well-being, and to encourage social inclusion.

The extended schools programme also involves wider society by making schools the hub of communities, and increases the value of education among parents, as it were, by getting them involved. In addition, it provides wider social and economic benefits by helping with community regeneration.

The programme ran homework clubs and breakfast clubs; offered after-school youth provision; and, in some schools, helped with GCSE exams. Help was also provided for parents, particularly in areas of social disadvantage. Budget cuts will be widely felt, but it is in socially disadvantaged areas that they will be felt most acutely. Figures suggest that about 500 schools will be affected. That equates to about 120,000 pupils, many of whom are the most vulnerable children. There is about a 40% reduction in funding for the extended schools programme. In stark contrast, more than £1 billion is being spent on similar programmes for schools in England.

Some Members have focused their attention on Caitríona Ruane. However, this is not an issue for just the Minister of Education. Michael McGimpsey, the Health Minister, recently brought a case to the Executive over projects and initiatives with which he was involved but was unable to fund. My understanding is that he has now received funding.

Therefore, it is not an issue solely for Caitríona Ruane. This morning, some Members, particularly those on the DUP Benches, targeted Caitríona Ruane.

However, I did not hear much talk about whether they support the amendments, especially amendment No 2, which mentions Peter Robinson as Finance Minister and as a member of the Executive. After all, it is an Executive issue.

Mr Storey: Every time the Minister gets into a corner, her party colleagues try to shift the blame on to the Finance Minister. The bids have been made, the budgets have been allocated, and the House has given an agreed amount to the Minister of Education. Therefore, she must decide her priorities. Over the past few days, the Minister has told us repeatedly that she is the Minister. Therefore, let her make the decisions. That is all that we are saying. We are not attacking her; we are merely stating a fact. If the Minister has the ability, let her produce the goods.

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

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety asked the Executive for funding for certain projects, Mervyn Storey knows that a precedent has been set. Therefore, funding is an Executive decision — it is not a matter solely for the Department of Education. Even at the draft Budget stage, Caitríona Ruane raised the issue with the junior Ministers and with the Department of Finance and Personnel. The funding for children and young people comes from OFMDFM, and the motion — and the Sinn Féin and SDLP amendments — touch on the fact that the funding has not been mainstreamed. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCausland: The extended schools programme is an important initiative. Therefore, I am happy to support the motion. The programme has targeted schools in disadvantaged communities. It has contributed to breakfast clubs, homework clubs and extracurricular activities, which have enriched the lives of children. The programme also offers family support, social services and nursing services. All those things have made a marked difference in many needy communities.

All the services that have been delivered are especially suited to the needs of communities, families and schools in areas where there is particular need. We listened recently to deputations to the Education Committee from representatives of controlled schools in the greater Shankill area and in north Belfast, and, in the near future, we will hear from representatives of the maintained schools. Principals from the controlled schools highlighted the daily problems that they face as they try to teach children in those communities. They explained clearly and graphically the benefits of the extended schools programme and other initiatives that have come to an end.

As a governor of three primary schools in north Belfast, I endorse those principals' representations.

They painted an accurate picture of the benefits that the programme has brought. For instance, Wheatfield Primary School has developed a close relationship with the Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership, and it has brought additional money into the community and into the school through the URBAN II programme, which develops communities where the need is particularly great due to the legacy of the Troubles.

The deputations from north Belfast and the Shankill emphasised the shortcomings of short-termism. That is why the extended schools funding should be mainstreamed, as the motion suggests. Those teachers were calling for stability and security, and they were calling for the programme to be mainstreamed so that it is reliable and dependable. Schools and principals devoted time and effort in setting up the various aspects of the initiative, such as breakfast clubs or after-school clubs.

They have worked with providers, teachers, parents and the community. Suddenly, after the work has been completed, the ground has been removed from beneath their feet. I fear that that will create disillusionment in schools and, in particular, in the communities. People will claim that they tried to work with schools and contribute to the process — and, in some cases, it is difficult to encourage parents back into school — only to find that the ground has been pulled away and the whole process has collapsed. They will question the point of trying.

It is necessary to mainstream the programme in order to ensure that parents and schools that make an effort are rewarded properly for that commitment. The Minister of Education has a large budget. In the context of that overall budget, the cost of the extended schools programme is a minor proportion. The problem is not the Department's budget but the Minister's decision to de-prioritise the extended schools programme.

Dominic Bradley reminded the House of the quote that junior Minister Kelly made on 4 February 2008. As a member of the Minister's party, the junior Minister outlined that it is the Minister's responsibility to set her budget.

The Minister made the decision to de-prioritise rather than mainstream, and, therefore, the Assembly must demand that she mainstream the extended schools programme. Paul Butler said that it is not a matter for the Minister of Education only — he might be correct. However, the responsibility lies with the Minister of Education. Much of the focus in the education sector has been on selection and transfer, but the Assembly must focus on establishing provision for children from the start of their schooling, particularly through the extended schools programme.

Mr Beggs: The improvement of educational opportunity is a practical method of enabling individuals to enhance their situation and widen their future options.

During the Budget process, I highlighted the presentation by Professor James Heckman, who spoke at an early years symposium in Belfast in 2007. He is a Nobel Prize-winning economist who works in Belfast, and he advocates a simple message: investing in young people makes economic sense. As Members said, investment should not focus on 11- or 12-year olds, because the earlier the investment, the greater the potential rewards. Therefore, investing in the early years is vital to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds who, along with their parents, will benefit greatly from some assistance.

During the Budget process, I met — through the all-party group on children and young people — the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and both junior Ministers to convince them to provide funding for children's issues. Additional funding was, subsequently, provided. Thereafter, decisions were to be made by individual Departments, and it is regrettable that the extended schools programme has not been prioritised by the Department of Education.

Mr Storey: I want to reinforce the Member's point about prioritisation. When the Department of Education submitted its Budget bid, restoration of funding for children's and young people's projects ranked 24 of 32 projects. The Minister, obviously, did not consider it a priority. However, lo and behold, the curriculum, assessment and ICT guidance for Irish-medium schools was ranked 13.

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

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for that contribution. Choices must be made, and the Minister has announced plans to post a leaflet on post-primary transfer through the door of every household in Northern Ireland. How much will that cost? Could that money pay for half of the community and social economy after-school clubs, which require approximately £1.6 million?

Will the Minister deliver the goods to the children and their parents, or will she fail, having stuck to her dogmatic policies? Those are the choices that she must make, in line with current spending priorities.

2.15 pm

I shall concentrate on breakfast clubs and after-schools clubs, which the community and voluntary sector have provided. My colleague Basil McCrea concentrated on the schools sector. I was shocked and disappointed to learn that a group called Skools Out — in my own constituency — in Antiville in Larne, was among those that had been advised that funding was no longer available. The money that those schools received from the children's fund was discontinued at the end of March 2008.

In a written answer to me, the Minister acknowledged that responsibility for childcare transferred to the Department of Education. Having allowed some time to pass before tabling any further questions, I learned that, despite her acknowledgement, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety had found money from his budget, even though it did not fall within his policy remit, to extend projects until the end of June 2008. It is essential that those projects continue beyond that date, yet the Department of Education has avoided its responsibility and has not prioritised properly. I hope that the Minister of Education will reinstate the funding.

The Antiville project is vital. It has helped the children educationally and has stabilised the community, which had suffered some trauma in previous years. The project has improved community relations, because the children, their parents and the staff come from a wide range of community backgrounds and have mixed together successfully. Elderly people in the community have taken part in inter-generational work, and people in the area have been involved in community and environmental clean-ups. Cross-community ventures have taken place, involving the schools and Churches on cultural play days. All that work has taken place in an area that had a weak community infrastructure. The project is a model of good practice, in which many improvements have been made.

The involvement of several Departments is essential to such projects. The Department of Education has the primary responsibility, but the project also helps parents to get back to work, which involves input from the Department for Employment and Learning. The project improves community relations, which falls under the remit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and it promotes neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion, which are issues for the Department for Social Development. Despite all that, no funding is available. If a detailed assessment of the constructive work that has been done in Antiville were to be carried out, I am certain that it would result in continued funding for the project. I hope that that issue will be addressed.

Many of those social-economy projects require only relatively small amounts of funding to provide breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. In Antiville, that would amount to approximately £13,000 a year. The parents have to be charged for the service, but in an area of disadvantage, they are often unable to pay. Without departmental funding, the project is at risk. Children may have to be left at home alone over the summer or their parents may be forced to give up work.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the debate,

and I have listened carefully to the many points that have been made.

Agus mé ag tabhairt freagra ar an rún, ba mhaith liom a aibhsiú gurb é mo phríomhfhócas aghaidh a thabhairt ar riachtanais oideachais páistí leochachaileacha, go háirithe iad sin i gceantracha is mó atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste sóisialta.

My key focus in responding to the motion and proposed amendments is to address the needs of our most vulnerable children, particularly those in areas of greatest social disadvantage. As would be expected, the Department of Education has a particular interest in actions that serve to raise standards. We are all aware that education can change lives for the better. It is the exit door from poverty and the cycle of deprivation, because a good education expands employment opportunities and earning power.

The challenge facing me, as Minister of Education, is to ensure that each and every child fulfils her or his potential. By ensuring that every child leaves school literate, numerate and equipped for adulthood, we secure our society's social and economic future. That is a massive challenge, to which each and every one of us must respond.

Although it is obvious that the quality of a school and its teachers is crucial to the educational outcomes that pupils achieve, research here in Ireland and across the world highlights the powerful influence of the community and the home, too. Sadly, the educational outcomes for many of our young people are jeopardised because of the challenges that they and their families face, such as poverty and low aspirations, and because it can be hard to see the value of doing well at school.

We must do more together to address those challenges and to ensure that the value of education is recognised by every parent in every community.

For many years, most schools have sought to expand the educational opportunities for their pupils through a wide range of after-school provision and out-of-hours learning. I pay tribute to their commitment and to the wonderful work that they do. After-school activities are provided voluntarily in some cases and through parental donations in others. However, schools that serve the needs of disadvantaged pupils have many difficulties to overcome in order to run after-school programmes, and the extended schools programme recognised that need by providing access to a full funding stream for eligible schools. For example, the programme enabled children in the most deprived areas to start the day with a good, healthy breakfast — *tús maith leath na hoibre*; a good start is half the work — to attend homework clubs, to engage in after-school clubs for sports, arts and drama, to have opportunities for family learning, and to take part in many other initiatives.

When visiting schools' after-school and breakfast clubs, I have been impressed by some of the outstanding work that has been going on. There is no doubt that pupils enjoy the activities, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hard work and enthusiasm of principals and school staff in putting such programmes together.

Extended schools activities are designed to raise standards by making children more ready to learn or by breaking down barriers to learning. Some schools have been able to use the programme to free up staff to become more involved with other agencies, and that improved integration and partnering of services is occurring in an area in which there is much more scope for greater integration for sharing of services.

Thig leis an chlár scoileanna breise cur leis an chomhchuspóir leibhéil gnóthachtála a ardú.

The extended-schools programme can, therefore, contribute to our common goal of raising levels of achievement.

Basil McCrea mentioned the figure of £100 million, and the concern that we do not have it. We do not have that £100 million. Anyone who thinks that one can cut major programmes, involving four Departments, and then tell beleaguered Departments with small budgets to mainstream the programmes is extremely naive. If every party in the Assembly wishes to deal with disadvantage — and I welcome the debate — I look forward to their support for my requests for extra resources. If we are serious about dealing with disadvantage, we must have extra resources.

All Members who spoke talked about the extended schools programme — and it is a good programme. Why has it been cut? It has been cut because the Department of Finance and Personnel has not provided the finances for it to proceed in its current form. As I have said, from the outset of the 2007 Budget process, I have recognised the value and importance of the programme, and I have continually — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Education: I have continually highlighted that in correspondence with the Finance Minister — many times. As far back as September 2007, I wrote to the Finance Minister, and I highlighted the negative impact that any reduction in the programme would have on schools and on other groups. I continued to register my concerns throughout the Budget process. As recently as last month, I wrote again to the Finance Minister to describe the negative impact that reduced funding would have on the extended schools programme. I asked him to consider making further resources available, and I will continue to press the issue.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No. The Minister will not give way.

I asked for a meeting with the Finance Minister. What was the response of the Finance Minister whose party is crying crocodile tears over the extended schools programme? His response was that will not meet me.

It is worth noting that £1 billion is being invested in schools in England so that all schools will have extended school status by 2010. What happens here when money that should go into education is included in the block grant? The Finance Minister does not put it into the education budget.

Anyone who thinks that we can deal with disadvantage without putting extra money into the education budget is living in never-never land, folks — *[Interruption.]*

I wondered how long it would be before we heard discriminatory comments about the Irish language. Children who learn through the medium of Irish deserve the same rights as children who learn through the medium of English.

In taking decisions on budget allocations — indeed the whole way through the Budget process — I recognised the importance and value of the extended schools programme and the need to do everything possible to maintain the level of funding available for that programme. However, I was simply not able to do that within the overall budget available to me. What I did do, which nobody has mentioned, was to mainstream more than £16 million of funding, despite a tight budget — *[Interruption.]*

I wish people would not rudely interrupt.

Mr Speaker: Order: Members should not be shouting across the Chamber. Every Member, within the time constraints given, has had an opportunity to speak. The Minister is now responding.

The Minister of Education: As part of the 2007 Budget process, I managed to mainstream funding that was previously provided by the children's fund, which effectively removed that amount from the Department of Education's budget. That amounted to over £30 million in each of the budget years, £10 million of which was for extended schools. In 2008-09, I have had to divert resources away from other services — in a time of already constrained resources — to continue funding activities that were previously funded by the children's fund. Take the blinkers off, folks, and give a bit of credit where it is due.

The Assembly needs to find the funding. I found £16 million funding, which is being provided directly to school leavers — that funding has been mainstreamed; £8 million funding continues to be available for early-years provision, together with funding for school-based counselling, which I heard many people

talking about, and there is £6 million for the extended schools programme.

It has been difficult. I recognise the importance of the extended schools programme, but with the Budget allocation available to me, I was not able to make up the entire amount that was previously covered by four Departments.

I raised the difficulties presented by that shortfall in funding on many occasions. On 20 September 2007, I met the Finance Minister to discuss the indicative Budget allocation. I highlighted the difficulties caused by the removal of the children's fund, and I followed that up with a letter to Peter Robinson, specifically highlighting the difficult position and the negative impact that the removal of that fund would have on schools and other groups should funding for the extended schools programme stop. I highlighted that the expectation of Departments was that children and young people's funding would be mainstreamed and would be included in departmental baselines, and that it would, therefore, not be up to individual Departments to find the money from their Budget allocations in the future.

On 5 October 2007, following receipt of the draft Budget allocation for the Department of Education, I again wrote to the Finance Minister to strongly register my concerns about the proposals, especially during the first two years of the Budget period.

On 8 October 2007, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, highlighting my concerns for the future of the children and young people's programme, given the level of allocations being proposed, and pointed out that I did not have the funding to continue with key elements such as the extended schools programme, which has been of great benefit to nearly 500 schools across the North.

In response to a request to the Department of Education on the extent to which the mainstreaming of children and young people's projects was possible, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, highlighting the shortfall in funding for children and young people. Following detailed consideration of the draft Budget allocation, I again wrote to the Finance Minister to update him. I highlighted that the indications were that funding for children and young people was one of the areas where the proposed allocations would have a significant adverse impact, and again pointed out Departments' understanding that this funding was to be mainstreamed.

I wrote to the Finance Minister again on 22 October 2007, raising my concerns about the level of funding proposed for 2008-09, and 2009-10, and that I would have no option, given that he was refusing to deal with the issue, but to consider a reduction in the budget provision for children and young people's projects.

On 7 January 2008, I again wrote to the Finance Minister to make him aware that concerns had been raised during public consultation on the Budget in relation to the removal of children and young people's funding from departmental baselines, and my inability to fill that gap given the proposed allocation. Did he listen to that public consultation? No, he did not.

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

In a further letter on 11 January 2008, I reiterated my concerns over the level of funding that the Executive had made available to me for children and young people's programmes and the problems caused by the failure to baseline those allocations for Departments.

2.30 pm

I followed that up with another letter, which advised the Finance Minister that the funds allocated to my Department would leave limited scope for making the necessary improvements to primary-school funding and the early-years programme.

I wrote to the junior Ministers and the Finance Minister again, on 17 April. In that letter, I highlighted the negative impact that the reduced level of funding would have on the extended schools programme. I also asked for further funding to be made available for me to allocate to extended schools.

Ní ligfidh mé faill tharam i rith na bliana acmhainní breise a iarraidh leis an chlár thábhachtach seo a athbhunú.

I will continue to press, at every available opportunity during the year, for additional resources to restore that important programme. Although I accept that budgets have been set and that we must implement them, it is also imperative that we are aware of the implications that these cuts will have on children, young people and local communities.

The social and economic impacts of the programme are felt beyond education. Although the issue concerns me, as Minister of Education, I hope that it is also of concern to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. It is welcome that his colleagues on the Back Benches are exercised about the matter; I hope that they will lobby him strongly.

Is léir chomh tábhachtach agus atá an clár seo ón doicheall atá ag scoileanna agus pobail áitiúla roimh na gearrthacha seo. Níor beartaíodh an clár seo mar sceach i mbéal bearna, nó ní mar sin a bunaíodh é; mar sin, tá an doicheall roimh an laghdú sa chlár sothuigthe.

The significant adverse reaction that the reduction in funding for extended schools has provoked from schools and local communities is evidence of the importance of the programme. I wish that schools and local community groups had been listened to during the consultation stage: I hope that they will be listened to now. The extended schools programme was never

intended to be a short-term, stopgap measure and it was not set up in that way.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No, I will not. The response to the reduction in the extended schools programme is understandable. However, funding has been made available to almost 400 schools and targeted especially at schools that operate in the most socially disadvantaged areas. That number is reduced because the absence of postcode data for pupils enrolled in nursery, primary and special schools — in the first years of the programme — forced us to rely on location, rather than the percentage of pupils drawn from areas of disadvantage.

That problem has been resolved in the primary- and special-school sectors. We now use pupil postcode data to identify schools that draw 51% or more of their pupils from the most disadvantaged areas. That means that, irrespective of the level of funding available, 88 primary and special schools that were previously eligible on the basis of location are no longer eligible. That is balanced by 70 previously ineligible schools, across all sectors, which are now eligible.

My officials will check the Hansard report to ensure that any Members' questions that I have not answered are responded to in the near future.

We must break the link between educational under-performance and social disadvantage. No one should play politics with the extended schools budget. I look forward to working with all Members, including the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to secure the necessary resources. I welcome that there is broad agreement on the matter. As other Members have said, this —

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

The Minister of Education: This issue affects schools across the North of Ireland. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has clearly outlined why the amendment tabled by Sinn Féin is necessary. If the proposer of the motion, the proposer of the SDLP amendment, and those on the DUP Benches opposite, are serious about returning funding to extended schools, they will support the Sinn Féin amendment.

The motion mentions the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's responsibility in the issue but no one has referred to that in the debate. I accept that the Department of Education has a responsibility; the Department of Finance and Personnel also has —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me get on a roll before I give way. The Department of Finance and Personnel also has a responsibility in this situation. The Minister of Education has clearly stated that there is insufficient

money in her budget to carry the project forward. Basil McCrea, Mr Storey and Mr Dominic Bradley stated that the Minister has a massive budget within which she should be able to find the necessary money. Would those Members agree to the Minister taking funding away from special-needs schools? Would they agree to the Minister taking funding off the classroom assistants?

I recall that many of those Members carried placards in support of the classroom assistants; do they now think that the money should be taken from the budget for classroom assistants? Perhaps the Members want the money deducted from the school transport budget or from the funding set aside for free school meals.

One cannot tell the Department of Education to find a massive shortfall by the summer; it cannot be done. The Minister has found £16 million to mainstream the issue. She said that the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and other Departments must play their parts. Childcare services are in place to ensure that parents can be economically active. Why should not the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment play a role in providing funding for those services? Is that not an innovative way to approach the funding issue?

The SDLP's amendment refers to youth services. The Department for Social Development has a significant role in youth services and in the community and voluntary sector, which is also tightly constrained by budgetary considerations.

We must look at this collectively. If we are serious about resolving the issue of extended schools, we must do it in a serious manner. If the true objective is to ensure extended schools provision, party-political point-scoring will not achieve it. If Members are serious about the matter, they should support the Sinn Féin amendment.

Basil McCrea appeared on television only a fortnight ago in an Oscar-winning performance — 'Wuthering Heights' would not have had a look-in. He said: "we have let them down". He did not use the royal "we"; he meant that all Members have let them down. He said that the Education Committee, the Assembly, and the Executive had not played their role. Today, in the Chamber, in another Oscar-winning performance, he said that it is the fault of the Minister of Education. It is not the fault of any one individual. Let us ensure that everyone who has responsibility for extended schools and childcare provision —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member explain why Sinn Féin supported the Budget and the Programme for Government when it was clear that the Executive programme's children fund would be withdrawn and no longer protected?

In his former life, as a spokesperson for health, can the Member not recall the commitment given to the Assembly that any moneys left over from the monitoring round would be diverted to the Health Service — not to education?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I give Mr O'Dowd an extra minute.

Mr O'Dowd: I missed your comment about my former life as a health spokesperson.

The Budget was supported by the parties in the Executive, and it was right that the Budget was approved. However, Sinn Féin states — and all parties in the Chamber agree — that a serious crisis faces communities over the issue of extended schools. The time is right for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to meet the Minister of Education: the Minister of Education has informed us that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has refused to meet her to discuss the issue. The first thing that should happen is that the Ministers should meet, thrash out the issue and find more funds for the programme.

I commend the Sinn Féin amendment to the House.

Mr Attwood: I thank all my colleagues who have contributed to the debate. Behind the sound and fury, people privately, if not publicly, agree with all that is in the Ulster Unionist and SDLP amendments.

I will deal first with comments made by the Minister of Education, as some of them raised fundamental issues of governance and accountability. She said that she had written repeatedly to DFP on the matter. I am certain that that can be proved.

On 4 February, the then junior Minister said in the House:

"We are confident that the available funding should mean that no child or youth programme will be reduced or cut." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 27, p173, col 1*].

Will the Minister of Education explain how a junior Minister in OFMDFM could make such a statement without contradiction from his colleague — her party colleague Mr Gerry Kelly — who shares that office in OFMDFM, when she had written repeatedly to DFP and put the Executive on notice that she would have to cut childcare provision in her budget?

Considering that you went to such lengths to ensure that you were protected on the matter, why did your Sinn Féin ministerial colleague not dissent from the comments that junior Minister Paisley made in the House? That is a fundamental issue: you are claiming one thing, but your ministerial colleague casually accepted, without contradiction, another junior Minister's remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to address their comments through the Chair.

Mr Attwood: Excuse me; I am addressing my comments through the Chair. I ask the Minister to reflect on what I have said and to come back to it.

The Minister is contradicted by the experiences that PlayBoard has endured over the past number of months and weeks. The situation at PlayBoard was highlighted on this morning's BBC news headlines at 7.00 am, 8.00 am and 9.00 am, when its representatives spoke exasperatedly about their difficulties. I fail to understand why the Minister of Education did not address PlayBoard's concerns in her response to the House. Indeed, I think that Mr Beggs mentioned that earlier.

PlayBoard representatives said that when childcare services were transferred from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to the Department of Education in the past 18 months, it seemed as though nobody took responsibility for the type of projects in which it is involved — childcare services for the six- to 12-year-old age group. Despite writing to the Minister, meeting her officials, writing to OFMDFM and trying to get somebody in her Department to accept political responsibility for something that is in her Department's remit, PlayBoard has not been successful in having its problem resolved. There is a possibility, therefore, that in six weeks' time — on the eve of the summer holidays — 6,000 childcare places and 58 projects may be in jeopardy, and thousands of parents will not know what childcare provision will be available for their children over the summer months.

If the Minister were so determined on the issue, and if she had managed her own interests so well as to have written to DFP, why did such a responsible organisation as PlayBoard have to go to the media this morning and shout from the rooftops that nobody would help it and that nobody in her Department would accept responsibility for it?

If I were the Education Minister, I would beware. Churchill said that your opposition is in front of you, and your enemy is behind. I remind the Minister of that, because her party has accepted the primary clause in the Ulster Unionist Party motion stating that they express concern that the extended schools funding has not been mainstreamed. Given that her own party is expressing concern about her conduct in not mainstreaming that project, if I were the Minister, I would be very concerned.

Mr B McCrea: Various Members are attempting to form consensus on the issue. I am surprised as to why Members are able to do that on this issue but not on others. Perhaps it is because attempts are being made to shift the blame and move the responsibility to someone else, because it is something for which nobody wants to take responsibility.

There are several wider issues to the debate. I take exception to the Minister of Education inferring that

only Sinn Féin cares and that the rest of us are ogres who do not care. That is not true — we are all here because we care.

2.45 pm

The Minister insinuates that change will happen, but that only Sinn Féin is in favour of it and only the change that it proposes is the right way forward — that is not true either. We all accept that change is inevitable, but the way in which that process happens is just as important as the result that it produces. The Minister is not approaching matters in the right way.

Mr Storey: The Minister also asserted that she had continually written to the Minister of Finance and Personnel — perhaps her letters were in Irish, so he did not understand them. However, the Minister of Finance and Personnel did respond to her, and allocated £26 million in the Budget to the Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. As a result of further representation to him, a further £3 million, £5 million and £5 million was allocated over the next three years respectively. Therefore, money was allocated to the sector, but the Minister failed to prioritise it.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for his intervention — I will deal with the question of who is responsible shortly.

The Minister derides those whose view differs from hers. She accuses those who speak out of being naive and leads us to believe that all right-thinking people believe in her, and in her alone. The Minister also suggests that the unions all support her, but that is not true either. She mentions the Catholic Church's view and implies that that matches her position.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is reading from the wrong speech.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister talked about a group of educationalists that was now eligible for the extended schools programme. However, had she listened to us earlier, when we talked repeatedly about early-years interventions, the need to invest in the most socially disadvantaged and the need to protect our schools in such areas, she would have had the unanimous support of the House. Instead, she provokes controversy

The Minister mentioned the Irish language in passing, but she misrepresented our position on it. I am not against the Irish language, but I am against its being politicised and resources being taken from other areas to support it, for political gain. That is my problem with it. Mr O'Dowd suggested that we should list the areas from which we can take resources so that we can look after the children, those living in poverty and the disadvantaged in our society. I will point out where money is being wasted — on political flights of fancy.

Mr O'Dowd: Tell me what is on the list.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister says, time and time again, that she is the Minister, not anyone else.

Mr Kennedy: All Members will have heard a voice from the Sinn Féin Benches — that is not the voice of the Sinn Féin Minister but of her little helper.

Mr B McCrea: The UUP will not support the Sinn Féin amendment. That is not because the UUP fails to support anyone who looks for more funds for extended schools — it will give that support and has made a commitment to do so. The UUP will offer whatever support it can towards securing more money for extended schools. However, in-year-monitoring funding is not the way in which to resolve the issue. It is a long-term issue, and the people involved —

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will give way provided that it is a short intervention.

Mr O'Dowd: The in-year funding is only intended to see us through this year's crisis. There must be a long-term funding project.

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to accept that intervention. My objection to the amendment is that we want to make it clear that there must be long-term, sustainable funding, which should be mainstreamed. We will support calls for such funding. The issue should be a top priority for the Minister.

I must commend Mr Attwood for his winding-up speech on amendment No 1. The question that must be answered concerns who is to blame for the shortfall. Mr Paisley Jnr, a former junior Minister, stated that there would be no funding shortfall. There has, actually, been a cut in funding — not of 40%, but of 50%, which nobody picked up on.

When I said that we were all responsible, I meant exactly that. However, the person who bears primary responsibility is the Minister of Education. I want to know what the Minister is going to do to address this issue. What is she going to do about the schools that are not going to receive any money and that will have to cancel entire projects? I do not want to hear platitudes; I want results.

How are we supposed to explain the lack of funding? We can take no greater measure than to try to build social cohesion. This matter is not about politics and it is not about grandstanding — Oscars, etc, have been mentioned. We tabled the motion because we believe in it.

The fact that the Minister cannot find £3 million to £4 million out of a budget of £1.7 billion says more about her ability to manage her budget than it does about our ability to address this issue.

We are in a situation in which the famed Sinn Féin machine, which was so effective in opposition, is

starting to creak at the seams in Government. Decisions must be taken, people must be included in the process, and issues must be prioritised.

When Minister Ritchie was arguing for more funds for the Department for Social Development, and Minister McGimpsey was arguing for more money for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I recall people saying that they should not do that because it would lead to the collapse of the Government. Where was the Minister of Education at that time? Did she call for more money for the Department of Education? I heard nothing. The silence was deafening. It is unreasonable for her to expect us to say that the lack of funding was someone else's fault.

People may ask why we are getting involved in this issue. I have explained that I am passionate about this matter, and that it needs to be addressed. It was put to me by a member of Sinn Féin yesterday that politics and the education of our children are incompatible, and that this issue is too important not to address. I concede that if there is an attempt to bring about a genuine new beginning, and if the Minister and her party accept that we all have a right to voice our opinions, to put our points of view across, and to engage in dialogue and debate, we will find a way of addressing the issue. However, we all have to get out of the trenches, because the people expect us to deliver, and none more so than the poor people who live in areas of social deprivation.

We reject the Sinn Féin amendment because we do not believe that in-year funding is the right way to address the issue. Core funding should be sought. We agree with much of what the SDLP Members have said, but, on this occasion, we are going to sit on the fence in respect of their amendment. We apologise to our friends about that.

Mr Spratt: The opposition is falling apart.

Mr B McCrea: It is good that Mr Spratt has joined us.

We want to bring focus to our message. The motion is the right way to do that, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, if amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 will fall, and I will proceed to put the Question on the motion, as amended.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern that the Extended Schools funding for children and young people has not been mainstreamed; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department of Education to ensure that this essential support for children and young people continues.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill

Second Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill [NIA 15/07] be agreed.

The Bill will provide a comprehensive framework for the regulation of all those who use goods vehicles as part of their trade or business. As it is early in the proceedings, I should point out that — in the context of this Bill — when I mention goods vehicles or heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), I refer to vehicles with a fully laden or gross plated weight in excess of 3·5 tons. Vehicles up to that threshold are commonly — *[Interruption.]*

Mr I McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not in order for Members to leave the Chamber in a manner that is quiet and is respectful to the Minister?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I agree. I ask for order. I ask Members to return to their seats, or, if they intend to leave the Chamber, to do so in an orderly fashion.

The Minister of the Environment: Vehicles up to the threshold of 3·5 tons are commonly regarded as light goods vehicles, and are generally outside the scope of this Bill.

Carriage of freight in Northern Ireland is almost exclusively by road, and it is a vital ingredient in the successful development and maintenance of a growing and vibrant economy. The freight industry consists of approximately 15,000 operators using approximately 35,000 goods vehicles. Many are small businesses, individually or family operated, with one or two vehicles; some larger organisations have vehicle fleets that number in the hundreds.

In 2006 alone, goods vehicles lifted 60·8 million tons of freight in Northern Ireland and transported it by road. It is interesting to note that the most popular commodity in Northern Ireland was crude minerals, followed by food, drink, tobacco and building materials. Internationally, the single largest commodity that was transported was building materials. The Republic of Ireland was by far the most popular location in the European Union for imports to and exports from Northern Ireland.

The road freight industry is regulated under primary legislation that dates back to 1967. A new legislative framework is needed to meet the needs of the modern, twenty-first-century freight logistics industry.

The current road freight legislation is deficient in a number of areas. First, only one quarter of the industry

is regulated — those who carry freight commercially, commonly referred to as the hire-or-reward sector. The largest part of the industry — those who carry their own goods as part of their trade or business — is not regulated. That sector is commonly called the own-account sector.

Secondly, the administration and enforcement of the freight industry regarding roadworthiness and transport and traffic legislation is hampered by insufficient funding. In some cases, the hire-or-reward sector already pays more than anywhere else in the British Isles, while the own-account sector contributes nothing, as it is outside the scope of freight-operator licensing in Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, the current legislation lacks sufficient sanctions to penalise operators who act illegally, or to act as a deterrent to other operators tempted to do likewise. Fourthly, the legislation lacks clarity regarding who is or is not required to have an operator's licence, which leads to the unfair practice of unlicensed operators undercutting the licensed hire-or-reward sector while claiming to be own-account businesses.

Finally, the compliance level of the Northern Ireland freight industry — in the areas of maintenance obligations and transport and traffic law — is amongst the lowest in Europe. The current legislation does not provide sufficient powers or resources to counteract that level of non-compliance in a meaningful way.

What is needed is new legislation that provides the Department of the Environment with sufficient power to ensure that the freight industry is effectively regulated and safe; that non-compliance is properly penalised and reduced; and that everyone in the industry can operate in an environment that is fair and competitive.

I will now set out the key drivers of the Bill. I will then draw attention to its main provisions, and comment on my vision for the future of the freight industry.

There are four key drivers for change — road safety, unfair competition, organised crime and environmental pressures. Perhaps the most important of those issues is road safety. Some statistics make for happy reading, but those that I will refer to do quite the opposite. It does not give me any joy to read those statistics, or to set them before the House.

Last year, a roadside freight vehicle compliance survey was carried out by the Driver and Vehicle Agency at a number of locations in Northern Ireland. Of the HGVs that were randomly stopped, 40% were not roadworthy; over 50% had offences that were serious enough to warrant prosecution; and 30% were subject to some form of prohibition.

3.00 pm

In addition, data gathered from the agency's testing stations showed that, of the 26,267 HGVs tested in

2007, over 45% of the four-axle rigid vehicles, over 37% of all rigid vehicles, and over 32% of articulated vehicles failed the goods vehicles licensing test the first time round. That is unacceptable, and needs to be addressed before more people are killed or seriously injured on our roads.

The question may well be asked whether Northern Ireland is any better or worse than other parts of the United Kingdom or Europe. I mentioned earlier that compliance with roadworthiness standards by the freight industry in Northern Ireland is among the lowest in Europe — a fact that is all too true. There are only two regions of Europe lower in compliance than Northern Ireland. I will not mention those regions, but I can point out that one of the regions of highest compliance is Great Britain, where there is a comprehensive full industry licensing regime.

It is true that driver behaviour is a greater contributor to road collisions than the conditions of the vehicles used, and drivers are under greater pressure than ever to carry out calls and collect and discharge loads within tight time frames. That leads to the temptation to overload, to drive longer hours and to cut maintenance and rest times. In the 2007 DVA survey, for example, 26% of drivers checked were in breach of drivers' hours regulations.

The second driver for change is that of unfair competition. There is a belief that it is unfair that only those who carry goods for hire and reward have to contribute to the regulation of the industry. That belief is further exacerbated by evidence of the unlicensed own-account sector and illegal operators taking commercial business from the hire-and-reward sector, thus undermining its viability. That, too, is unacceptable and must be addressed by the Bill.

The third driver for change is crime prevention, particularly organised crime. I, like all Members, welcome the progress made in moving away from the difficult years of terrorism and unrest. However, the problem of organised crime is ongoing in Northern Ireland. Organised crime needs vehicles — particularly freight vehicles. As not all vehicles are presently linked to an operator, there is a weakness in the enforcement capability that must be addressed.

Finally, there are environmental pressures. Operating centres — the places where vehicles are normally kept when not in use — have the potential to affect the owners or occupants of adjacent properties through, for example, noise, night-time working, lighting and vehicles accessing the centres. There is presently no sanction within the road freight licensing legislation against operators who do not pay attention to the environmental standards of their operating centres. That also must be changed.

Having established the deficiencies of the existing legislation and the drivers for change, I now move on to the main provisions of the Bill.

The Bill will provide powers to require all operators to have a licence if they use goods vehicles to carry goods as part of a trade or business. All operators must satisfy standards of fitness and, if carrying goods for others, financial standing, repute and professional competence.

The Bill will allow continuous operator licensing, which will be reviewed by the Department every five years and require all applications for an operator's licence to be advertised, thus allowing those in the vicinity of operating centres to make representations on environmental grounds.

The Bill will require environmental factors for operating centres to be included in the consideration of an application for an operator's licence, and it will require operators to give an undertaking to adhere to roadworthiness standards and transport and traffic law.

The Bill will give the Department the power to hold inquiries, exercise discretion, and apply tougher enforcement, including impounding of vehicles against non-compliant operators.

The Department's vision for the future of the freight industry is for an industry that is safe for its own sake and for all other road users; fair, in that the whole industry can operate in a competitive environment and on a level playing field; highly regarded as being one of the best in Europe, not one of the worst; attractive and an industry that people will want a career in and be proud to work in; valued by its customers and respected by all; and a clean industry, making its own contribution to a better environment.

That vision is shared by both the major freight industry representative bodies — the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association — which are supportive of the efforts of my Department in bringing in the proposals laid before the House today. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr McGlone): A Aire agus a LeasCheann Comhairle, I welcome the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill. The comprehensive Bill of 61 clauses and six schedules will make provision to regulate the operators of goods vehicles. In the Road Haulage Association's evidence, it told the Committee that in the North, there are more than 15,000 registered keepers of over 35,000 commercial vehicles that weigh in excess of 3.5 tons. The freight industry, politicians and consumer organisations highlighted the need for the Bill. The existing policy and legislation on licences for freight services, and how those services are delivered, must be changed.

I will touch on some of the issues that the Bill is intended to address. In the North, approximately three quarters of those in the industry are own-account operators, who are not required to be licensed. In a welcome step, the Bill ensures that licensing applies to the hire-and-reward and the own-account sectors.

The Bill defines an operating centre as:

“the base or centre at which the vehicle is normally kept”.

The Bill seeks to ensure that the operating centre must be specified on the licence; it becomes an offence to use a place as an operating centre unless it is specified as such on that licence.

The application procedure for licences will become more open and transparent. The Department will prescribe the information to be included on the application form, including details of vehicles and their operating centre. If a person fails to provide that information, the Department may decline to proceed with the application and refuse the licence. The Department will publish a notice of each application and decision in a regular publication that is issued to all statutory consultees.

The legislation also states that the applicant must place a notice of the application in a local newspaper and that a person who owns or occupies land in the vicinity of the proposed operating centre may make a representation against the application on the grounds that it would be environmentally unsuitable.

The Bill provides that, when the Department issues a new licence or amends an existing one, it has powers to attach conditions; for example, vehicles may be prevented from causing danger to the public when entering or leaving any road adjoining an operating centre of the licence holder. Other conditions may prevent, or minimise, any adverse effects on environmental conditions arising from the licence holder's use of a place as an operating centre, and fines for any contraventions of that licence are introduced.

As with the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, enforcement will be important. The Bill proposes that the Department will have powers to stop and enter vehicles and to access the premises in which vehicles are kept. It provides the Department with the power to seize documents when it considers that an offence has been committed, to fine a person who wilfully obstructs an officer or fails to produce documents and to detain a goods vehicle being used without an operator's licence.

Given the importance of enforcement, the Committee requested details of the current level of resources for enforcement, and it calls on the Department to make available the resources necessary to enforce the Bill. The Committee has already conducted some pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill. On three occasions, we heard from departmental officials, and we also heard

evidence from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association.

Committee members were pleased to hear that the Department was involved in extensive consultations with the industry; it invited 15,000 operators to attend a series of industry briefing sessions at eight venues throughout the North in February and March 2008. It was also good to note that, by and large, the presentations were well received, and the general response to those briefings was extremely positive. That provides an exemplar for future departmental consultations.

During the Committee's deliberations on the Bill, some of the main areas addressed thus far were the financial impact of the proposed new arrangement on operators; the weight requirement of 3·5 tons, which facilitates the regulation of larger vans; and the regulation of a person whose lorries are based in the Republic but who operates lorries that travel and operate in the North. We discussed whether the legislation could lead to the displacement of businesses, particularly in some border areas, and how the road-safety value of the Bill's measures could be minimal unless they are taken in conjunction with the authorities in the Republic. We also considered the impact of the Bill's requirement for one-man businesses to have a licence and a yard in which to keep their vehicles.

As previously stated, the Committee has taken evidence from two key freight-industry associations, and looks forward to hearing the views of others when the Bill reaches Committee Stage. Generally, the Bill seeks to increase regulation of the freight industry, and, on behalf of the Committee, a *Aire agus a LeasCheann Comhairle*, I support the Bill.

Mr Ross: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this latest piece of DOE legislation to come to the Floor of the House.

The freight and transport industry must be recognised as vital in Northern Ireland. Those in the industry are keen that standards are high, and that vehicles on our roads come up to scratch. Unfortunately, the industry in Northern Ireland has among the worst roadworthiness records in all of Europe, as the Minister mentioned — a record of which none associated with the industry could, or would, be proud. It is, therefore, widely recognised that something must be done.

The Bill is a positive one, which aims to improve the road safety of all in the industry, and to improve industry standards. It has been broadly welcomed by those in the industry, and, as the Chairperson mentioned, the Committee heard from key stakeholders, namely the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association. Furthermore, the Committee was briefed on three separate occasions by departmental officials about the content of the Bill. The reaction

from the key stakeholders has been very positive, and they obviously recognise the major issue of vehicles that are in bad repair on our roads. The sheer number of unroadworthy vans and lorries on our roads is startling.

It is important to recognise that the Bill should help to target organised crime and improve enforcement. It is welcome that the Bill contains provisions to ensure that any vehicles operating illegally can be impounded. As the Chairperson of the Committee said, enforcement is vital on that issue. Any legislation that aims to reduce the frequency of accidents and generally improve the safety of vehicles on our roads must be welcomed, and this piece of legislation is no different. However, we must also recognise that there are some concerns about the impact that the Bill may have on small operators, as the legislation also places licensing requirements on the own-account sector.

It would be a positive step if similar legislation were implemented in the Irish Republic, and there are some issues about an independent operator parking a van or lorry at home. Those, and other, issues will, no doubt, be examined in more detail in Committee; however, it must be said that, during evidence sessions, the two major organisations representing goods vehicle operators did not share our concerns, even with regard to small, independent operators with smaller vans.

Mr T Clarke: The Member referred to the two transport associations that made representations to the Committee. Is it fair to say that, although they did not share the concerns that were raised at Committee in relation to small operators, they perhaps do not necessarily represent the one-man bands, or the small operators, to whom our concerns were addressed? Will the Member join me in looking forward to examining that issue in more detail when we scrutinise the Bill?

Mr Ross: The Member is absolutely right. There are many independent operators in Northern Ireland — perhaps more than anywhere else in the UK — and it is important that those people have a full input into any deliberations of the Committee on this legislation. Judging from the briefing sessions provided by the Department, and from the stakeholder meetings, the issues of cost in the operating centres did not seem to cause undue concern; again, that is something that we must examine when we scrutinise the Bill.

The Bill will be welcomed by the industry, and I look forward to examining it in more detail in Committee. I support the Second Reading of the Bill.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I echo other Members who spoke in welcoming the Second Stage of the Bill. The legislation is long overdue; however, along with similar legislation that is being introduced in the 26 Counties, it will help to improve the reputation of the Irish freight and

transport industry. As was pointed out, we have some of the worst safety records in Europe and rank close to the bottom of the EU countries' league table.

I welcome the fact that the legislation is at last being introduced. Again, it shows the ineffectiveness of the direct rule Ministers who did nothing about the situation for so long, even though the matter was first raised well over 15 years ago.

The Bill will require own-account operators, who make up about three quarters of the industry here, to be licensed. Enforcement here is not strong enough, and the absence of full operator licensing means that vehicle owners and drivers do not pay enough daily attention to the roadworthiness of their vehicles. The Department of the Environment carries out commercial vehicle enforcement checks annually, and the latest figures show, as the Minister has outlined, that 40% of the vehicles checked last year were found to be unroadworthy. The road safety implications of that situation are stark, and must be addressed urgently.

3.15 pm

We share concerns about how the term “operating centre” is defined and the impact that that definition will have on operators, particularly small operators who do not have a specific storage or parking area for vehicles. Many operators, particularly of smaller vehicles that are covered by the legislation, park on streets and in yards. It is important to identify — and the Committee will help to do so — any possible adverse impact that the legislation will have on the owners of those vehicles.

Will the Minister outline what contact she has had with the Minister for Transport in the South in order to maintain a level playing field across the island, and to ensure that goods vehicles' standards rise effectively, and quickly, after the Bill is adopted? In March this year, InterTradeIreland's 'Freight Transport Report for the Island of Ireland' advocated a joint approach to the licensing of commercial vehicles and the enforcement of vehicle standards.

The existence of different regulations on the island creates difficulties for companies that operate across Ireland. That is an issue that people in the industry have identified and that they want addressed. My party welcomes the measures contained in the Bill. When the Bill becomes law, our roads will be significantly safer and the image of our freight and transport industry will improve. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Gardiner: I support the legislation, which will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

If it achieves nothing else, the legislation will be important in hindering cross-border fuel smugglers. It will also enable more effective enforcement and contribute to a reduction in organised crime. The Bill

will create a level playing field in the haulage industry and improve overall road safety, which must remain a serious concern for all Members, bearing in mind Northern Ireland's appalling road death figures.

The Bill introduces minimum standards that govern an operator's fitness to hold a licence. It also distinguishes between those who carry their own goods and those who haul cargo for others, under restricted or standard operating licences. That basic — some would say minimum — level of regulation is good, fair and sensible.

The criteria of "good repute", "financial standing" and of licensees having to be "professionally competent" that the Bill incorporates, are set out in European legislation. There is a continuing requirement to meet those criteria.

Legislation is only as effective as its enforcement regime — and the regime envisaged in the Bill is strong and effective. The central elements include an impounding scheme and minimum standards for vehicle maintenance and operating centres.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly. I look forward to its detailed scrutiny by the Environment Committee. It is good to see a Bill going through its usual stages in the House. Far too many recent Bills have been granted accelerated passage, and that damages the Assembly's integrity. I support the Bill.

Mr Ford: As the sixth Member to speak in the debate, and at the risk of being extremely boring, I also support the principles of the Bill and I welcome its introduction. I thank the Minister and her team for the manner in which they have engaged with the Committee in pre-legislative discussions. I regard that as an example of how legislation can be properly processed through this House, while ensuring that the issues are covered.

It is remarkable how much unanimity has been expressed in the House on one or two points of common concern. The Bill is necessary on a fundamental level; it is a key component in dealing with organised crime and with road-safety concerns. The minister highlighted the fact that, even though GB's freight sector has one of the best records in Europe for complying with maintenance obligations and with transport and traffic law, Northern Ireland has the third worst.

Clearly, that is an example of why the legislation should be similar to that which applies in GB. That said, the Assembly should not talk down key players in the road-transport industry, because, undoubtedly, the best firms in Northern Ireland are the equivalent of the best in GB. The problem is, however, that serious concerns about a long tail of operators, particularly among the own-account sector, as opposed to the hire-and-reward sector, must be dealt with.

Issues that have arisen, and have already been mentioned in the debate, include the conditions of road vehicles that have shown up in roadside tests, not only in Northern Ireland, but, sometimes, in vehicles from Northern Ireland that have been stopped across the water. Other issues, such as drivers' hours, show that a great deal must be done in order to reach the required standard.

I share concerns that Members have raised from different sides of the House, particularly on the issue of the requirement for operating centres to ensure that freight vehicles are parked overnight away from residential areas. Clearly, that is positive. However, there are concerns as to how that will affect a large number of operators, particularly one-man businesses, that have vehicles that fall just inside the 3·5-ton limit — Transit-type vans, for example. The Assembly must consider exactly how the details of that will work to ensure that residential neighbourhoods are protected and that certain businesses are not subjected to particular financial penalties.

I also want to highlight the serious problem — and welcome the fact that it has been raised by Mr McKay, among others — that that will not be done in parallel with the Republic, where similar legislation is needed. As the Chairman highlighted, cross-border issues may need to be considered, such as how businesses may operate across the border without being subject to the same level of regulation. In that context, it is absolutely clear from evidence that the Committee has already received from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association that there is a need to proceed with legislation in Northern Ireland. I urge the Minister to continue to make representations to her opposite number south of the border to ensure that the Irish Government take that action. It is understood that some of their officials want legislation to be introduced alongside that of Northern Ireland.

The Bill is before the Assembly. I endorse its principles and look forward to the Committee's engagement in serious scrutiny.

Mr Weir: It will come as no surprise that I, like other Members, suggest that the Assembly can largely be united on the Good Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill. The previous Bill that the Department of Environment dealt with at Committee Stage was the Taxis Bill. I remember that, during its Second Stage, I made the somewhat rash statement that I looked forward to the Committee Stage. Many weeks later, I began to eat my words. I shall, therefore, make no similarly rash comments about the current Bill.

Like other members of the Environment Committee, I believe that there is a sense of anticipation that the good job and detailed scrutiny that was carried out on the Taxis Bill will be replicated with the Good Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill, which is similar to the

Taxis Bill because it will have a large element of detail. By the end of the process, it will be ensured that, although there is broad support for the Bill's principles, its detail matches its aims.

Mr Elliott: I hope that the Member is aware that there are legitimate concerns about the Bill that must be dealt with. In particular, people are anxious that it does not give unfair advantage to illegal operators, who will continue to operate illegally, over those who operate legitimately, and that it must also put a much higher cost on such activity in order to clamp down on illegal operators and put the squeeze on them.

Mr Weir: It is important that whatever the regime — which is part of the detail that must be teased out in the Bill — it deals particularly with sanctions against illegal operators. One of my hopes for the Bill is that it will create a much more level playing field than that which currently exists.

As the Member, and, indeed, others have indicated, genuine concerns must be dealt with, such as ensuring that the regime does not place undue burden upon small operators. It is important that that is carried through in the Bill's detail. As Mr Ford mentioned, the issue of operating centres must be dealt with. I suspect that that matter will exercise the mind of Mr Elliott.

One matter that worries me, which the Assembly must ensure is tackled properly, is the unfortunate attitude that the Republic of Ireland's Government seem to have towards the issue.

They seem to be living in a form of Neverland; I am referring not to Michael Jackson's ranch, but to the fact that they are in denial. We do not want to reach a situation where a range of businesses have to hop across the border to take advantage of a very lax system. In the same positive manner in which the Assembly will address the issue and ensure that road haulage is brought up to the mark, the Republic of Ireland's Government, too, must face up to their responsibilities.

Like other members of the Environment Committee, I welcome the fact that we have already had an opportunity to deal with the issue to some extent. The Committee was given a heads-up on detailed scrutiny of the relevant issues through contributions from departmental officials and submissions and evidence from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association. Like most members, I did not possess a great deal of knowledge on the issue and found the submissions informative; they will help to frame the debate.

Members' broad welcome of the Bill in the Chamber today has been largely mirrored by the industry. The responses at a pre-consultation round of meetings across the country have been broadly positive. However, there are some concerns that must be addressed and dealt with properly.

I am glad that a large section of the industry has welcomed the Bill. I want to highlight some of its advantages, on which other Members may have already touched.

As Mr Gardiner said, we need legislation that brings us into line with the rest of the United Kingdom and, beyond that, with most of Europe. It is important that we have a level playing field. Many road-haulage firms already operate at a high standard, but are penalised for doing so because a minority do not behave responsibly.

The Bill will help at an international level. Evidence submitted to the Environment Committee indicated that Northern Ireland is in the bottom three road-haulage industries in Europe, along with the Republic of Ireland and Romania, in what might be described as the relegation zone. Our system may not turn into the Manchester United of the haulage world overnight, but perhaps we can emulate Fulham Football Club, by moving up the table to escape relegation.

It is deeply shaming that Northern Ireland's haulage system is considered one of the worst in Europe. From a practical point of view, it has a detrimental effect on reputable road-haulage firms. Evidence submitted to the Committee indicated that Northern Ireland-registered vehicles are targeted for vehicle checks across the water in mainland Britain and parts of Europe because of the poor reputation of Northern Ireland and the belief that there is a greater chance of finding fault with them than with vehicles from England, Scotland or Wales. Consequently, the present regime penalises Northern Ireland's many reputable firms. Those firms will benefit from the raising of standards to meet international requirements.

As has been said, the Bill also has a role to play in reducing organised crime. It is important that we ensure that measures are put in place to achieve that.

Finally, the Bill is important for road safety. Road safety will be improved if the regulations ensure that drivers work regulated hours and take appropriate breaks. Again, it comes down to the level playing field. An operator that is not complying with the regulations will be able to transport a customer's goods in three days, because its drivers do not take rests or follow a proper shift pattern. An operator that does meet the standards in full will not be able to compete, because the journey will take its drivers four days. That creates a situation where those companies that act in an unregulated manner not only undercut the competition, but threaten safety on the roads.

3.30 pm

A wide range of measures has been debated in the Chamber including alcohol limits, speed limits and issues concerning young drivers. A safe system is also required for road haulage in this country because,

given the nature of the vehicles concerned, accidents are much more likely to involve fatalities. Therefore, the legislation will be an important contribution towards road safety.

The legislation has been welcomed across the Chamber, and it can be scrutinised in great detail in the coming weeks. We can produce a piece of legislation which is not only beneficial to everyone in Northern Ireland, particularly the industry, but on which the Assembly can look back with a sense of pride. I support the Bill as proposed.

Mr Elliott: I support the Bill in principle, but some concerns have been raised with me by people who live in the west of the Province near the border with the Irish Republic, where a number of operators will not operate to the same standards as those whose vehicles are registered in Northern Ireland. That gives me huge concern, although I know that nothing can be done about that. I am sure that the Minister will take the issue on board and raise it at the North/South Ministerial Conference.

In addition, some protection must be given to smaller operators: perhaps they could be given some flexibility as regards the exemptions. Although they may be operating on a legitimate basis at the moment, additional costs may drive them out of business. Across the Province, a number of businesses have only one or two goods vehicles, and this legislation will put significant additional pressure on them. I want the Bill and the exemptions to include some flexibility. The exemptions are quite tight, and I would like the Committee for the Environment scrutinise them to see whether more flexibility for smaller operators can be built in. I broadly welcome the Bill, but I want to see more scrutiny of it by the Committee.

The Minister of the Environment: I am grateful for the valuable and informative contributions that Members have made to the debate. The matter will now be taken forward to the Committee for the Environment.

The Chairperson of the Committee outlined the need for the Bill and said that change to existing legislation was necessary. He said that, similar to the legislation on taxis, enforcement would be a huge issue as regards the implementation of the Bill, and I agree. He knows that, as a result of the recent comprehensive spending review (CSR), the enforcement capability of the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) is being enhanced by an increase in resources over the next three years. In addition, further improvement in the resources dedicated to freight enforcement will be expected because of the fairer licensing system and structure that the Bill will introduce. I will take that on board in the next CSR period. I thank the Chairperson for his positive reaction to the Bill and his acknowledgement

that much work has been carried out on those issues in the pre-presentation of the Bill with the industry and with the Committee.

Mr Ross talked about the importance of the freight industry to Northern Ireland, and I endorse his comments. He talked about some of the key drivers of change in the industry, which I mentioned in my opening speech. Along with other Members, he also mentioned the impact of the Bill on small businesses. Measures in the Bill will only affect businesses that use vehicles and combinations — vans and trailers — with a gross plated weight in excess of 3·5 tons.

In an intervention, Mr Trevor Clarke made the point that the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association do not necessarily represent the small operators. That is absolutely right, and, with that in mind, the Department contacted all keepers of goods vehicles of 3·5 tons and over to inform them of the proposals and their likely impact. Given that that matter is — if I may use the term — a key contentious issue for the Bill, I look forward to it being discussed before the Committee for the Environment.

A large proportion of small businesses are already licensed as hire-or-reward operators, and are therefore already in the system. They will appreciate a more equitable licensing system, and the Bill's impact will be helpful to them in future.

Mr McKay welcomed the Bill and said that it was long overdue. He spoke about road-safety implications and the definition of “operating centre”, and he asked whether we had been in contact with the Minister for Transport in the Republic of Ireland, which we have. Although there is no all-Ireland approach to operator licensing, officials have met their Irish counterparts specifically to share their respective plans about those matters. Furthermore, officials regularly meet to share information about compliance, enforcement operations and the impact of their respective policies on each other's jurisdiction.

Mr Gardiner supported the legislation, and was happy that Northern Ireland is being brought in line with the rest of the UK. He spoke about many of the legislation's drivers, such as road safety, organised crime, fairness and the enforcement regime, which he hoped would be on a par with that in the taxis legislation.

Mr Ford supported the Bill's principles, commended the pre-legislation discussion with the Committee and acknowledged those who currently comply with the law in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely right to do that. Many people in the freight industry act in compliance with the law, and I entirely endorse Mr Ford's comments about that. To use his phrase, the legislation is being introduced to deal with the “long tail” of operators.

Mr Ford, like Mr McKay, raised issues about operating centres and the fact that people find it difficult to park on the street or at the side of their homes. In any event, when not in use, vehicles should normally be parked at a designated operating centre. On-street parking is not permitted; however, in certain circumstances, by designating his house on the license, an operator may be allowed to park his vehicle at the side of that house. Given the large number of single-vehicle operators in Northern Ireland and the number who currently park at home, officials are considering implementation options, including the possibility of short- or long-term grandfather rights — it says here. *[Interruption.]*

Those are grandfather rights — not grandmother rights.

The requirements for operating centres will be detailed in subordinate legislation, and, as with the taxis legislation, there will be son-of and daughter-of types of legislation. This is the enabling legislation, and the issues relating to operating centres will be subject to full public consultation, of which, I am sure, the Committee will wish to take notice.

Mr Weir expressed concerns about the Republic of Ireland's enforcement system, and those comments were endorsed by Mr Elliott, who was concerned about illegal operators coming from the South. Existing enforcement powers are effective, and I propose to replicate them in the Bill. However, I will also add new powers, such as the power to impound any goods vehicle, and its contents, if it is detected as being used on the road without a proper operating license. In addition, I will include a power to curtail a license where the operator is undergoing disciplinary measures, either in the short or long term, for certain misdemeanours — action proportionate to the so-called crime. In such circumstances, the maximum number of vehicles that are permitted to be used may be reduced, or one or more of the vehicles may be removed from the license.

Finally, Mr Elliott asked about exemptions. He felt that there should be more flexibility in the Bill. Flexibility will come from the regulations. The Bill includes the power to make both temporary and permanent exemptions using subordinate legislation. Temporary exemptions will be for emergency situations, and no decision has been made about the list of permanent exemptions. For example, some people have asked about agricultural vehicles.

Officials intend to examine the issue of permanent exemptions in further detail, and I am sure that it is something that the Committee will want to address.

I thank Members for their contributions to the debate on the Bill and for the questions and issues that have been raised. I am confident that the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill will enable Northern Ireland to develop the policy it needs to ensure the safe and

proper use of goods vehicles, promote fair competition in the industry, improve road safety and lead to better-quality services for all.

My officials and I look forward — unlike Mr Weir — to working closely with the Environment Committee as it begins its detailed scrutiny of the Bill. I have no doubt that this scrutiny will prove very valuable, as it did with the taxis legislation, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill [NIA 15/07] be agreed.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker:*]

ADJOURNMENT

Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we begin, I inform Members that the Minister for Regional Development has written to me to advise that, due to unavoidable diary commitments, he regrets that he is not available to respond to this adjournment topic today. He has arranged for the junior Minister Mr Gerry Kelly to respond on his behalf.

The proposer of the debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who are called to speak will have 10 minutes.

Mr Gallagher: The widespread hope of the people of Northern Ireland was that the restored Assembly would be responsive to local needs. I have brought this issue to the House because the needs of a scattered rural population in Fermanagh and in west Tyrone need to be addressed.

The town of Enniskillen suffers from serious traffic congestion — it has poor traffic management and inadequate parking provision. The Department for Regional Development (DRD) intends to extend pay-and-display parking in Enniskillen, and there is much local consternation about this proposal. That is not a knee-jerk reaction to the proposed increase in costs — local circumstances are such that the consequences of this plan, were it to be implemented, would be very serious for this area.

There is inadequate parking provision, given that people have no option but to use their car to get to work. There are currently 95 free car-parking spaces at Queen Street in Enniskillen, which is located on the north-west side of the town. The social security office, hospital, Housing Executive and tax office are all located at the same side of town. If parking charges were introduced here, the only free parking space with reasonable capacity left locally would be at Hollyhill, on the other side of the town. Those who presently use the Queen Street parking facility would have to travel right through the centre of Enniskillen to make use of it. This is a town where it can take up to 45 minutes to travel less than one mile. The people — and their political representatives — have been calling for a bypass for more than a decade.

The cost implications for drivers, should these new charges be imposed, would be punishing. Members will be aware of the recent AA report highlighting car charges, which shows that the cost of running a car has

risen by £2,000 over the last 12 months. This is unwelcome news for motorists everywhere. For some, leaving the car at home may be an alternative, but the poor system of public transport in the west means that there is no such alternative. The car is a necessity for people getting to work.

I have spoken to some people who travel to Enniskillen, and I can safely say that the cost of fuel every week for their travel is at least £25.

For some, the cost is much higher. Therefore, fuel costs are about £25 a week, or £100 a month. If parking charges are to be introduced, those workers will have to pay a further £15 a week, or £60 a month. That will put pressure on household budgets. We are all too aware that many households are already struggling with the mounting demands on their budgets — the increase in rates, grocery bills, electricity charges and the price of heating oil, not to mention the dreaded water charges that are also being proposed by the Department for Regional Development.

3.45 pm

It is little wonder that some of the 650 workers who signed the petition against car-parking charges are saying that if the charges go ahead, it will not be worth their while continuing to work. Any assertion by Roads Service that the Queen Street car park is necessary for town-centre shopping is undermined by the fact — and it is a fact — that that car park lies vacant on Saturday and Sunday.

Implicit in this matter are issues of fairness and equality. Many of the workers who use the Queen Street parking facility are at the lower end of the pay scale. As I said, in the absence of public transport, they have no alternative but to use a car to get to work. DRD must recognise the specific needs of local people and that its failure to invest in infrastructure in the west — in this case, Enniskillen — means that it has an added responsibility to ensure that the people of that area are not even more seriously disadvantaged.

Finally, I must stress that any plans to extend pay-and-display car parking in Enniskillen must be scrapped.

Mrs Foster: I commend Mr Gallagher on securing this debate. As he said, car parking in Enniskillen is an issue that exercises many people, not least the workers who use the free car park at Queen Street. The fact that the price of fuel is going up instead of down is already putting a strain on people's budgets, but now they are faced with the prospect of being charged to park their car while they do their day's work.

It is not an exaggeration to say that traffic in Enniskillen is often in gridlock. One has only to visit Enniskillen at lunchtime on Saturday to experience that gridlock. Trying to find a parking space on a Saturday in Enniskillen can sometimes be very frustrating.

We are all very aware that Enniskillen is an island town, but when one drives around it five times on a Saturday in search of a parking space, one becomes even more aware of that fact.

There is a shortage of car-parking spaces in Enniskillen, and on-street parking is also a problem. Many towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland have witnessed the advent of the “redcoats” and can use on-street parking facilities for a limited time only. As a result, in Enniskillen, people do not stay in town as long as they would want to because they are ever mindful of the fact that they must return to their cars within an hour.

Like Mr Gallagher, I met the Enniskillen Workers’ Protest Group in spring. At the time, the Roads Service told us that there were 1,430 off-street parking spaces available in Enniskillen. However, all car parks there operate at capacity, with the exception of the Hollyhill Link Road car park, which is a considerable walking distance from the town centre. I would say that all off-street car parking facilities in the town operate at about 98% capacity.

Fermanagh District Council has proposed building a multi-storey car park to resolve some of the parking difficulties in Enniskillen.

I support them in that endeavour. The council has spoken to the strategic investment board about that matter, and I mentioned it to the DRD Minister. There might, therefore, be a solution in the offing. However, it will not happen overnight, and it is an issue that DRD, the Planning Service and the council need to examine together.

Quite apart from workers and those who visit Enniskillen, business people, too, are frustrated with parking difficulties with regard to deliveries, obstructions and traffic control. Unfortunately, Enniskillen does not have a chamber of commerce. However, that did not stop business people coming together on the issue of parking, which has caused them a great deal of angst.

Enniskillen is a market town, and traders are convinced that parking difficulties have taken trade out of the town. Several big supermarket outlets, including Tesco and Asda, have recently come to Enniskillen, and they are, of course, welcome. However, there is concern among traders that trade is not getting to the town centre because of parking problems, and those concerns should be heeded.

Enniskillen is a tourist town as well as a place of work and a shopping destination, and visitors are always welcome to Fermanagh, the jewel in the crown as far as Northern Ireland is concerned — and I hear no voices against that in the Chamber today. The people of Enniskillen want to encourage visitors, and more car parking is needed for that to happen.

I commend the Member for bringing this matter to the House. I am interested in hearing what the junior Minister has to say, which I hope I am able to do because I have a meeting at 4.00 pm.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, have a meeting at 4.00 pm, so I will not procrastinate. I agree with much of what has been said. As other Members did, I met the group that is campaigning for more parking provision in Enniskillen and listened to its concerns. As the Member has just said, Enniskillen is an island town. Anyone who has sat in traffic on the Sligo Road on any evening — never mind at the weekend — knows that there are difficulties in getting around the town. Indeed, having people driving around looking for car parking spaces only adds to the congestion.

A long-term solution to the needs of the town must be found, and there are a number of sites in Enniskillen that are suitable for a multi-storey car park given its topography.

I have a number of concerns. First, the fact that Enniskillen is an island town and space is restricted means that there will be pressure on capacity. However, the review of car parking capacity — and if Mr Gallagher mentioned this when I was not in the Chamber, I apologise — was carried out before last Christmas, and any car park will be at full tilt in the run-up to Christmas. Perhaps Roads Service would take into consideration the time of year when the review was carried out, because that would skew the results.

Workers are concerned that they are being driven out of the town, and that the distance between car parking availability and their place of work is increasing. A moratorium is needed on any plans to increase charges in Enniskillen car parks while a solution is being sought. Roads Service is in discussion with the council, and the council has been proactive in the matter and will be making its views known. However, there must be a stay of execution on any plans for changing free car parking to pay car parking, or on any plans to increase the cost of pay car parking, in order to give everyone a chance to seek solutions to the problem and to create a partnership approach between elected representatives, the council and traders. I would welcome such an approach in trying to find a solution to this problem.

There have been many complaints about traffic wardens and about enforcement. As someone who has received a few parking fines in Enniskillen, I understand the difficulties there. However, there must be some level of enforcement, because if someone parks on double yellow lines and snarls up the whole town, that causes a problem for everyone. Sometimes the zeal with which the traffic wardens in Enniskillen carry out their job is quite extraordinary, especially if the time

has just run out on the parking meter. Nevertheless, there are serious parking problems in the town. I park primarily in the Buttermarket car park, but it can take a long time to find a space in it.

We want a more conducive atmosphere for everyone who comes to Enniskillen, regardless of whether they are coming to work or to shop, or whether they are tourists. It is a lovely town, but issues such as parking can cause difficulties. In Dungannon, which is the other major town in the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, there are similar parking problems that are off-putting for people who wish to come into the town.

We are competing with other towns. In Newry, for example, the two main shopping centres — the Quays and the Buttercrane centre — have over 2,000 spaces. Their capacity is impressive. The car-parking capacity in Enniskillen must be increased, and we must be fair to the people who are coming into the town to shop or to work. I have raised the issue several times with the Minister for Regional Development, and he has taken my views on board. There is simply not enough capacity in Enniskillen, and we must find solutions to that problem. Judging by the tone of today's debate, we are all keen to work together to find solutions for the good of everyone who comes to Enniskillen. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Elliott: Unlike the previous two Members who spoke, I do not have a meeting at four o'clock. However, I have a meeting in a couple of hours on the other side of Enniskillen, and the Members know what it is like to get through the traffic there, so I will be as brief as possible.

I thank the junior Minister for coming here to listen and to respond. I do not know whether there is any truth in the rumour that the Minister for Regional Development has gone to meet members of the Royal Family at a garden party in Hillsborough — perhaps someone can clarify that.

There are approximately 1,700 off-street car-parking spaces in Enniskillen. If one drives into Enniskillen during the week or at the weekend, it is almost impossible to believe that there are so many spaces, because you can never find one, especially in the middle of the day. About 50% of those spaces are free, and that is the crux of the matter. The Department for Regional Development is considering the possibility of reviewing that and converting some of those free car-parking spaces into paid spaces.

The major issue relates to people who work in Enniskillen. If people spend an hour or two in Enniskillen doing their shopping, they do not mind paying for the car park. However, the difficulty arises when people work there five days a week and have to pay considerable amounts of money for parking.

Enniskillen needs a multi-storey car park. I do not believe that Roads Service can develop such a car park in the near future, unless we hear otherwise today. However, there may be an opportunity for a private developer to progress that project, perhaps in conjunction with the council or others.

The surveys showed that there is a high usage of the car parks in Enniskillen. The former Eden Street car park on the west side of the town is to be transformed into a mixed-use development. The developer of that site must provide the same number of car-parking spaces that are on the site at the moment. However, I do not know whether there will be an insistence on providing additional spaces for the retail units. That is an important issue. That car park is highly used, and if more retail units are built there, it will bring more shoppers to that immediate area; therefore, there will be a need for more parking spaces.

That leads me on to the position of the overall project. We cannot look at car parking as a single issue.

4.00 pm

It must be examined in the context of a strategic assessment of the entire Enniskillen area. Road infrastructure, car-parking facilities and future parking requirements — taking into consideration the potential development of more retail units — must be examined. We must also consider the proposed southern bypass at the Cherrymount link road — which is a 10-year scheme — and the possibility of a north-west link road from the Irvinestown Road to the Belleek Road.

If those projects were completed, it would result in a ring road around Enniskillen. Without an overall strategic examination of the situation, we will be unable to progress. There are proposals to build new schools in Enniskillen; some have already been built. The new south-west acute services hospital will be built in Enniskillen, and, therefore, we must examine all those developments collectively.

If half the existing Queen Street car park becomes a pay car park, office workers in that area will seek free parking elsewhere. The current Erne Hospital site is an obvious target; however, it is already chock-a-block, and that will cause greater traffic congestion. Furthermore, it will cause access problems for emergency vehicles at the Erne Hospital.

The “redcoats” have had a significant impact on car parking in Enniskillen. An overall assessment must be conducted — as opposed to examining individual car parks — and, for that reason, car-parking payment systems should not be changed at the moment.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am aware that there are two Ministers in the Chamber who have to

attend meetings, and, therefore, I will be brief. I want to scotch the rumour that the Minister for Regional Development is in Hillsborough — he is actually in Cardiff at a BIC meeting. *[Laughter.]* I thought that I should clarify his whereabouts, although I do not know with whom he is dining.

I am speaking on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Murphy, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss public car-parking spaces in Enniskillen. I have asked Minister Murphy's officials to consider the Hansard report, because I will be unable to respond to all the issues; those issues can be forwarded to the Minister on his return.

By way of background for Members who are unfamiliar with Enniskillen — which is probably only me — I will briefly summarise the public parking provided by the Department for Regional Development and Roads Service in the town. There are 13 Roads Service car parks, which provide approximately 1,430 parking spaces. Of those spaces, 622 are free of charge, and 644 are charged at 30p an hour. A further 164 spaces at the Shore Road West and Quay Lane South car parks charge 30p for three hours.

Moreover, there are approximately 391 free on-street parking spaces in the town centre. Of those spaces, 369 are limited to an hour's waiting in any two-hour period, and 22 are disabled parking spaces. An extension — planned for the current financial year — is proposed to the car park at Wellington Place, which, when completed, will provide 36 additional free car-parking spaces for the western end of the town. In addition to Roads Service car parks, recent new developments in Enniskillen by Asda and Tesco have increased the overall amount of off-street parking by approximately 760 spaces. Furthermore, work has recently commenced to provide 350 additional spaces in conjunction with the extension of the Erneside shopping centre.

Roads Service is currently conducting an annual review of car-parking tariffs in major towns in the North. The review considers the demand for parking spaces and whether tariffs should be increased, decreased or introduced to help to manage demand. The review of parking tariffs in Enniskillen is based on car-park usage information gathered during surveys. Those surveys indicated that most free car parks — with the exception of Hollyhill Link Road car park in the east of the town — have reached, or are near to, capacity.

A couple of Members said that given that some of the statistics had been gathered in December and around the Christmas period, they gave a false impression. However, the exercise was carried out over a longer period, and although it is accepted that that particular survey was carried out over Christmas, it was balanced out by other parts of the overall exercise.

The Hollyhill Link Road car park is usually used at less than 20% of its capacity, and 150 free spaces are normally available in that area. The surveys also indicated that the pay-and-display car parks in Enniskillen are well used and regularly exceed 80% of their capacity. To provide adequate availability of parking spaces for shoppers and short-stay users, it is recognised that 20% of spaces must be readily available. A survey that was undertaken in June 2007 indicated an average usage of 82%, and a further survey in December 2007 indicated an average usage of 98%. However, it is accepted that car-park usage during that period skews the statistics.

Those surveys also indicated that additional short-stay car parking is required at the western end of Enniskillen, as the pay-and-display car park at Head Street is normally fully used, and the free-of-charge car parks at Queen Street and Wellington Place are also full during the working day. To improve the availability of parking spaces at the western end of Enniskillen, Roads Service proposed the introduction of pay-and-display at the 30p hourly tariff to Queen Street car park. It is expected that that will change the existing parking bays into 95 short-stay spaces for shoppers and other visitors, allowing a more fluent turnover of parking spaces throughout the day and short-stay access to many more vehicles.

Meanwhile, short-duration car parking is also required at the eastern end of Enniskillen, as the car parks at Quay Lane North and Quay Lane South are normally used fully. Roads Service proposed changing the car park at Quay Lane South to the 30p hourly tariff, which, again, would adapt the existing parking bays into short-stay spaces, resulting in increased capacity throughout the day. Roads Service is consulting with Fermanagh District Council and representatives of traders in Enniskillen about the proposed tariff changes arising from the review. Roads Service is considering comments and objections to the proposed tariff changes. Furthermore, comments that Members have made today will also be taken into account. Therefore, this is not a done deal, and there will be some consideration of what people have to say.

The challenge for Roads Service is to develop proposals that will increase the level of short-stay parking and that will be generally acceptable to the council and to traders, shoppers, workers and visitors in Enniskillen. Roads Service expects to make revised tariff proposals in the next six to eight weeks. Members should be reassured that a further period of public consultation on the revised proposals will be held before commencement of the legislative process, which is required to introduce amendments to current car-parking tariffs.

Some Members raised the issue of parking enforcement. I am aware that concerns have been expressed in the past about the level of enforcement in Enniskillen and that Roads Service representatives attended a

public meeting of local traders, councillors and members of the public about that issue in January 2008. Illegally parked vehicles not only create obstructions that increase congestion, but they frequently pose a serious road-safety problem. What is more, motorists who park illegally in designated bays, such as those reserved for blue-badge holders, prevent their use by those people who are entitled to park there.

A suitable level of parking enforcement is therefore needed in all our towns and cities to deter motorists from parking illegally or dangerously. In Enniskillen, Roads Service and NCP Services Ltd continue to monitor the performance of traffic attendants in the town to ensure that they carry on providing the necessary level of enforcement and customer service.

Several issues were raised during the debate, including that of a multi-storey car park. I am sure that Members are aware that the Department for Social Development is currently running a private-developer competition to redevelop Roads Service's Eden Street car park in Enniskillen. Those proposals include the provision of a multi-storey car park to replace the existing Eden Street car park.

Two meetings were held to discuss enforcement — one occurred in January and the other in March. The January meeting attracted a fair turnout of traders, shoppers and other interested parties. I remember television news reports that contained accusations that the enforcement officers were petty and had adopted an overenthusiastic approach to ticketing cars that were slightly outside parking spaces, and so on. I believe that only six people attended the second meeting. I have been told that that turnout was due to the perception that action had been taken and that, due to discussions with those involved, the situation had improved.

It might be worth pointing out that — although I accept that there are problems with car parking in Enniskillen, Omagh, Strabane, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon, as Members have articulated — Enniskillen has the largest number of parking spaces per capita. There are 1,434 spaces in Enniskillen, of which 622 — 44% — are currently free of charge.

If I have missed any issues, DSD officials will consult the Hansard report, and Conor Murphy will write to Members to fill in any gaps. Minister Murphy asked me to assure Members that Roads Service aims to ensure the good management of all car parks. In the absence of charges, all-day parkers would take up all the parking spaces that are most convenient to town and city centres. The use of charges in busy town-centre car parks, such as those in Enniskillen, encourage all-day parkers to use free or less expensive car parks on the periphery, keeping available the most convenient spaces for shoppers or other visitors. The aim is to help the vitality and viability of town centres, not the opposite.

I hope that I have addressed Members' concerns. However, I restate that I have asked officials to take note of the Hansard report of this debate, and I hope that any gaps in my answers will be filled shortly. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Adjourned at 4.12 pm.

Committee Stages

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

30 April 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)
Mr Mervyn Storey (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Declan O'Loan
Ms Dawn Purvis
Mr Peter Weir

Witness:

Mr Paul Everall	} Local Authority Building Control
-----------------	---------------------------------------

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): The next item on the agenda is the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill, and we will hear evidence from colleagues who have travelled from England. The session will be recorded by Hansard, so I remind Members that mobile phones must be turned off completely; otherwise they will interfere with the recording equipment.

I welcome Mr Paul Everall CBE, who is the chief executive of Local Authority Building Control (LABC) in England and Wales; we appreciate his making the effort to be with us today. Mr Everall, will you outline the role of your organisation and your experience of implementing building regulations in England and Wales that are similar to the regulations that are proposed in our Bill? Will you also detail your experience of the use of renewable energy sources in buildings in England and Wales? I invite you to share your wisdom and experience with the Committee.

Mr Paul Everall (Local Authority Building Control): Thank you very much, Chairperson. Good

morning, everyone. It is a great pleasure for me to be in Belfast.

I have been the chief executive of LABC for some three years now. Before that, I was a senior civil servant in London, advising Ministers in Whitehall on matters involving buildings. I was head of the Buildings Division in what is now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister — the title changed several times in the years that I was there. I was appointed head of the Buildings Division in 1991, so I served some 14 years advising Ministers on the content of the building regulations and on the building control system in England and Wales.

At that time, I occasionally had the pleasure of visiting Belfast as I used to sit as an observer on the Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee (NIBRAC). I believe that the Committee heard evidence from a friend of mine, Trevor Martin, who is chairperson of that committee. Since that time, I have been a member of the policy committee of the Consortium of European Building Control. I mention that because that role has given me the opportunity to study the different systems of building regulations across Europe, which I certainly found helpful to me in my Civil Service role.

I now turn to my current role. LABC is the representative body for local authority building control in England and Wales, and it represents some 276 local authorities that have building control responsibilities — either district councils or unitary authorities. However, we are not just a representative body, which is important. It is difficult for the Government to talk to all 276 authorities, so if they want a collective view of what local authorities think about Government proposals, they come to us, and we try to develop that collective view on behalf of all local authorities.

As the Committee may be aware, unlike in Northern Ireland, building control in England and Wales is subject to competition from the private sector. Private-sector bodies called approved inspectors can be licensed to carry out building control work. Thus, for example, people who are having building work carried out on their house can choose to use either the local authority or an approved inspector.

Understandably, local authorities want to maintain a decent market share across all aspects of buildings work — commercial educational, public and domestic. Therefore LABC is also a marketing body; it tries to sell the services of local authorities to architects, clients and developers and tries to convince them that they would be wise to use local authorities rather than private-sector building control.

I have been in that role for three years, and it has been an interesting time. Last month, the Government published a consultation document on the future of

building control. It suggests ways in which the system in England and Wales can be improved. We have held discussions with the Government about some aspects of that document, and I will be glad to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

There are two aspects of the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill that interest me. The first is the move from “deemed to satisfy provisions” to approved guidance documents. As a result of my experience, primarily in England and Wales, but also elsewhere in Europe, I have become a strong supporter of the guidance document system. Before the system in England and Wales was changed 25 years ago, we had very prescriptive regulations that made it difficult for developers to do anything innovative or to keep up to date with developments in Europe and implement directives such as the European energy building performance directive.

The system was inflexible; under the system that we now have in England and Wales, the regulations — which are themselves eight pages long — set the objectives that we expect builders to achieve in their buildings. Meanwhile, the approved documents for England and Wales, which are published by the Government, give guidance on how to comply with the requirements of the regulations. Those documents are not mandatory, but if developers want to do something different, they must convince the building control bodies that their proposals are at least as good as those contained in the approved documents. Following the advice of the approved documents, however, demonstrates compliance with the regulations, and means that a developer would be unlikely to be prosecuted for any breach of the regulations.

One of the challenges for central Government is to continue to update the approved documents so that they reflect changes in technology and the continuing demands of society. The Government proposes to review or change energy efficiency regulations in England and Wales every three years in order to tighten up the requirements on climate change.

The other aspect of the Bill that interests me is type approvals. Those are very important in England and Wales, partly because of the complexity of the environment. Type approvals allow an architect to present his design to one local authority, have it checked and approved by that authority and have it accepted by all other local authorities in England and Wales. We had to develop that system because of competition, which was first introduced in the housing sector in England and Wales under pressure from the National House Building Council (NHBC). The NHBC offered a form of type approval, in the sense that once it approved a house type, it could be built anywhere in the country, as long as the NHBC was used as the approved inspectors. Had local authorities

not decided to do the same thing, we would have lost a great deal of business to the NHBC because the process of getting plans checked was so much simpler.

The type approval system had to work very well; otherwise we would lose all our housing work to the NHBC. When I came to this job from the Civil Service, I was surprised to find that every local authority in England and Wales, without exception, had signed up to type approvals. The type approval system will work in Northern Ireland only if all local authorities agree to sign up to it or are required to do so. Type approvals are important in reducing the burden of the building control system on architects and developers.

Those two features were of particular interest to me when I studied the Bill, and I felt that I could share my views on them.

The third point concerned renewables. There is a great deal of interest from Ministers in Whitehall, just as there is here, in looking at the best way in which to combat climate change. As the Committee will have heard from other evidence, renewables may be the way forward. I have some concerns about how a policy might be applied. Personally, I believe that it is better to have goal-based regulations that set standards to be achieved rather than to prescribe that a certain proportion of energy must come from renewables. I would prefer that the use of renewables be encouraged through grant regimes or other forms of incentives rather than through regulatory change.

The Government in England and Wales have not yet proposed to require — through the building control system — that a proportion of the energy generated should come from renewables.

I am particularly concerned about microgeneration because last year some politicians were encouraging everybody to have wind generators on their properties. I have concerns about that from a building regulations perspective, because if generators are inadequately fixed or fixed to a chimney or to a gable wall, they can cause serious damage to the structure of the building, no matter how helpful they may be in reducing energy consumption. It may not be the case here, but building regulations in England and Wales contain requirements for electrical wiring and connections. It is important that wind generators on roofs are properly wired up and that the wiring complies with the requirements in the regulations.

I recognise the importance of increasing the amount of energy that is generated from renewable sources, but, personally speaking, I would not like to see it being made a mandatory requirement of building regulations in England and Wales. In a way, that would be against the philosophy of building regulations in England and Wales because we set objectives, for

example, by setting the maximum amount of carbon that should be generated from a particular property, and we allow the developer to choose how to meet those requirements. If we were to start prescribing too much, we would go against that general principle of flexibility.

I am conscious that I have spoken for about 10 minutes. I am sure that members would rather ask questions than listen to me. I hope that I have given a helpful introduction to the topic.

The Chairperson: Yes, indeed.

Mr Weir: Thank you. It is good to have a witness who has such experience in these matters. To use a cliché, a wise person learns from his mistakes, but a wiser person learns from somebody else's mistakes. You mentioned initial problems with the system that was put in place in England and Wales, such as inflexibility. How might we combat potential implementation problems in the proposed reforms and in the Bill for Northern Ireland?

Mr Everall: When I read the Bill, I could not see anything in it that might cause difficulty. Please do not take this the wrong way, but it often used to be the case that we would introduce changes to the regulations in England and Wales, and, two or three years later, Departments in Northern Ireland would examine our experience — including the guidance and the approved documents — to see what mistakes we might have made, and they were able to learn from our mistakes when producing deemed-to-satisfy requirements. Now, perhaps, the situation is different because all parts of the UK have been subject to the energy performance of buildings directive, which had to be implemented in Northern Ireland on the same timescale as that in other regions.

To answer your question precisely, I cannot see anything in the Bill that I find to be unhelpful. I recommend that you use guidance documents and encourage type approvals.

Mr Weir: I understand that planning policy in England and Wales has been a key tool in ensuring the inclusion of renewables in newly built houses. Given your experience of that in England, do you believe that Northern Ireland should adopt that process?

Mr Everall: There are contrasting views on that. I am a purist, and I believe that regulatory systems should not overlap. Measures included in building regulations should not also form part of the planning system. In England and Wales some planning authorities have attempted to set higher standards through the planning system than are required under building regulations. That confuses developers and is therefore unhelpful. For example, the London borough of Merton tried to establish higher standards for the

planning system than are required under building regulations; that is not a good idea.

The Government in England and Wales have developed a code for sustainable homes — Northern Ireland may use a similar code — that is not mandatory but encourages people to aim for higher standards of energy efficiency than present building regulations standards. It has a ratchet effect. Public-sector bodies will have experience of that, and bodies such as the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships advocate reaching the higher standards outlined in the code rather than compliance with building regulations.

Gaining experience in building homes at a higher level will make it easier to attain the required standards in 2010 when building regulation standards are next increased. Such a voluntary code is helpful, but to demand that the planning system provide that 20% or 40% of all new houses must have energy-efficiency standards that amount to a 20% higher standard than contained in building regulations is unhelpful.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council on the north-eastern building control committee. You said that every local authority in England has signed up to type approval. How is that managed? How do we ensure that a lower standard is not applied in one authority area and imposed on other areas, resulting in lower overall standards?

Mr Everall: If an architect wants to have a house type-approved, he takes the plans to a local authority, which ensures that the plans comply with building regulations. If the plans are approved, they are referred to LABC, which issues a certificate to all local authorities and the developer to the effect that the design has been approved and, if brought to a local authority, must be accepted. Checks must still be carried out on site, but local authorities do not need to check the plan again. As far as I am aware, that works very well.

The receiving authority might, occasionally, raise an eyebrow about whether the authority conducting the original type approval was too lax but such cases are uncommon. LABC has a technical working group to examine such issues and to provide advice.

Mr Beggs: During evidence sessions the Committee heard that houses built in Northern Ireland can be built to out-of-date standards in cases where development had commenced a long time ago. Recent building control approval was given to developments designed originally in 1973. Therefore houses are built with poor energy-efficiency standards and poor disability access. An amendment to the Bill could provide for the power to declare null and void any individual buildings

that have not been commenced on multiple sites after a specific time period.

Can you give us your views on such an amendment?

Mr Everall: I would have to think of what the implications are of such an amendment and if there were any compensation or fairness issues that need to be considered. I am not aware of the problem being widespread in England and Wales. However, the rules are basically the same: if you commence one house on a multiple site, that is regarded as commencing work. Therefore the rest of the houses in the scheme should be built to the earlier standards; even if the building regulations are tightened up before the work is completed.

That has not been a problem in recent years in England and Wales, as the demand for housing has been such that it is not in the developer's interest to take a long time to develop a site. However, it may be that with the downturn in the economy that this would be a good thing to start thinking about. You could introduce provision to create a time limit on how long an approval is listed. There are time limits — I think that it is three years in England and Wales — where you must make at least a start on the site; otherwise the building permit becomes invalid. It may be prudent to consider how you might extend that to cover all the houses on a site and not just the first one.

Mr O'Loan: Such provisions may be strictly beyond the terms of the Bill and may be covered under previous criteria for type approval. However, we all agreed that the implementation of the Bill is desirable. However, how exactly do we implement it? You talked about two ways: by agreement or by making it mandatory. In case agreement does not work, why do we not just simply make it mandatory?

Mr Everall: That may be more of an issue in Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, the incentive for local authorities to sign up to a voluntary scheme, run by LABC, is that if they do not, they are likely to lose work to the private sector. If you do not have competition from the private sector — and I am not aware that you are planning that at present — what is the incentive for every local authority to sign up?

Getting a local authority to agree to it would be the best option. However, if you have any fears that some authorities will not sign up to it voluntarily, you should seriously consider making it mandatory.

Mr O'Loan: We should consider why local authorities would not sign up to it.

The Chairperson: Imposing a different set of conditions or responsibilities on councils on housing provision may prove to be the tipping point in councils voluntarily signing up. We may need to consider a different approach.

Mr O'Loan: The issue of licensed inspectors does go beyond the proposals, but it is worth exploring. You seem to be saying that those inspectors have had a significant impact on the system.

Most of us who have some experience of the building control system in Northern Ireland would be pleased and impressed by the introduction of licensed inspectors. However, we should listen to experiences from elsewhere and whether the creation of an alternative has improved the system and made it more responsive. Is that your view?

Mr Everall: Yes. This is slightly difficult for me as my employers are a local authority. They are, of course, perfect in every way and we should never have introduced competition in England and Wales —

The Chairperson: The Hansard report has taken note of that. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Everall: However, in my previous days I did see the advantages of competition. Developers who have been around for a long time in England and Wales will say that the service that they receive from local authorities on building control has greatly improved over the past 25. There were stories told in the past of building control officers who found great joy in finding 101 reasons why a development did not comply with building control regulations.

The culture has completely changed, and building control recognises that unless it works with the developers to encourage and persuade them to comply, they can choose to go to an unapproved inspector. When the Labour Government came into power in 1997, Nick Raynsford, who was the Construction Minister, conducted a review of whether private-sector building control should continue. Ministers in England and Wales reached the conclusion that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages, and the Conservative and Labour parties have supported competition ever since.

The experience has been good, and developers often ask us why on earth politicians do not introduce competition into the planning system, as it might produce a more responsive and customer-friendly response from planners. However, you will understand why I will not comment on that. Competition improves the efficiency of building control.

The downside for us, and the reason that we need a marketing side, is that local authorities are there to provide a public service, but we are the building control body of last resort. People can choose to go elsewhere, but a local authority cannot turn work away and, therefore, we must provide an effective service. If all the lucrative work — by which I mean the commercial building work that generates large fees for the building control body — were to go to the commercial sector, it would leave local authorities to deal only with house extensions and similar work.

Although that is important work, building control would not be the interesting career that it is, and the service from local authorities would suffer. The biggest risk attached to introducing private-sector competition is that it would spoil the service that local authorities deliver. It is not only because I am chief executive of Local Authority Building Control that my recommendation is that it is not necessary to go down the private-sector route: there are other ways to maintain an efficient service.

Mr O'Loan: When talking about more efficient and lower-carbon homes, you said that your inclination is to set targets for the efficiency of households and to allow householders and developers to create methods to achieve them. You suggested that grant-aiding is preferable, particularly for encouraging microgeneration, to making it mandatory. My concern is that the point of a grant is to encourage people to do something that they might not otherwise do because the grant makes it more cost effective.

However, there are many cost-effective measures to improve the efficiency of homes, but lethargy and inertia prevent people from taking them. People could take sensible measures that would produce a quick payback, but they do not. I am sympathetic to the idea of encouragement rather than compulsion, but that is not producing results at the required rate, particularly among the existing housing stock.

Mr Everall: It would be difficult to see how regulation could address the existing housing stock. It would be a bold move for politicians to require people to carry out building work on their houses that they had not planned to do. However, without regulation that issue cannot be tackled through introducing legislation. Building control can get to grips with an issue only when someone states their intention to do some building work. Building control cannot touch people who are content to sit in their low-energy efficiency 1950s house and have no such intention. Therefore building regulations would not necessarily help to deal with the existing housing stock. If anything, it is even more important to provide incentives for people to improve the existing stock. Building regulations can set standard for new houses, but they cannot do anything about the existing stock.

Mr O'Loan: The question of how to encourage people to make improvements to the existing housing stock is left open.

Mr Everall: Yes, that leaves open the question of how we deal with the existing stock.

Dr Farry: Thank you, Paul, for coming over from England to brief the Committee this morning.

Returning to the issue of renewables, can it be argued that advances need to be made across a broad front in order to achieve carbon reductions? In the

same way that building regulations cannot affect existing buildings that are not going to be modified, people who do nothing with their buildings will not come into contact with the planning system.

I am concerned that exacting carbon reduction targets have been set in the Climate Change Bill. There is often a tendency to delay the pain of meeting targets by seeing them as something to be dealt with in the future and believing that tough decisions will have to be taken by our successors rather than by us. I am not sure whether that is a credible approach.

I am conscious that there is a target in England and Wales for all new homes to be carbon neutral by 2016. I was interested in your comments regarding how that will be achieved by taking a joined-up approach that incorporates all the different targets that are being set and all the relevant programmes.

Should there be grants to encourage homeowners to use microgeneration as well as regulations for new homes — introduced either through planning and/or through building regulations — in order to shift to microgeneration as quickly as possible?

There are some parallels between this issue and that of recycling. Initially, people were encouraged to recycle voluntarily, but without a great deal of success. Councils — particularly in Northern Ireland, and that is possibly one example of our being ahead of some councils in England and Wales — then began alternating between collecting household rubbish and recycling every other week, which resulted in a sudden upsurge in recycling. Recycling may have reached a plateau and will need a new initiative. Do you agree that recycling is an example of the effective use of regulation and encouragement?

My final point may contradict what I have already said about microgeneration. To what extent is it appropriate to encourage — either through planning or building regulations — microgeneration per household or per building, when some form of shared generation, particularly in new housing developments — for example, slightly larger wind turbines — may be more appropriate? I appreciate that a similar approach is perhaps already being taken in other parts of Europe. Do you see any particular cultural problems here that may be holding us back from introducing that — for example, a greater focus on owning one's property as opposed to the renting culture that exists in other parts of Europe? Is that a viable option, either different from individual microgeneration schemes or working in conjunction with them?

Mr Everall: Dealing with your last point first, in the case of using wind power, I would rather see a reasonably large wind pump generating power for 100 or 200 houses than 200 wind pumps on 200 houses. That is a way forward. The Committee may be aware

that the Government have announced that there will be 15 new eco-towns in England and Wales, and it will be interesting to know what the proposed energy-generation scheme will be for those.

The 2016 target that all new homes will be zero-carbon is very demanding. I do not believe that zero-carbon homes can be achieved without the full co-operation of the energy-supply industries. I do not believe that zero-carbon homes can be achieved simply by installing more insulation or more efficient boiler systems. That is partly because of all the electrical equipment, such as computers, that we now have in our homes.

In England and Wales a joint taskforce has been established involving the Home Builders Federation and the Government, which is developing a policy on how zero-carbon homes will be achieved by 2016. In my view, it will depend on the electricity-supply industry fully coming on board and moving towards using renewables rather than fossil fuels. I was interested in the session that the Committee had about that earlier this morning.

One of the challenges in England and Wales is that the Government have said that three million new homes are required by 2020 and that they want homes to be zero-carbon rated by 2016. It will be a challenge to meet both of those objectives at the same time. I am sceptical whether that can be done. Nevertheless, the fact that the Government have set such demanding targets has meant that there is much more dialogue between house builders and energy supply companies than in the past. There are moves afoot to extend that dialogue into the commercial sector.

In answer to Dr Farry's third point, there may be a role for promoting and encouraging microgeneration in the regulations, but I am nervous about being prescriptive. A couple of months ago, we might all have prescribed biomass as the right way forward. Now, of course, there is controversy about whether we are driving up world food prices because land that would otherwise be used for food crops is being diverted towards the production of biomass. I may be entirely wrong, but it would not surprise me if the use of biomass goes down the list of priorities significantly. When I was a young engineer, wave energy was to be the solution, and here we are 50 years later and it is not. The danger of being prescriptive is that we prescribe the wrong things.

Dr Farry: I appreciate the point that you make. I am sometimes tempted to make a comparison between the revolutions in renewable technology and information technology that have taken place over the past 20 or 30 years. Much concern is being expressed about whether current technologies are capable of providing significant reductions in energy use. There is

a need for investment in research and development in order to improve efficiencies, which must be driven by the market.

Huge improvements in information technology were brought about by consumer demand over the past three decades for more efficient high-performance, high-capacity devices. I foresee a difficulty in the renewables market, in the sense that there is not the same drive from consumers for more efficient devices. It is a societal benefit. People do not recognise the benefits to the individual of renewable energy that they can, for example, from a more efficient personal computer. In economic terms, there is a much greater problem with the "free rider" tendency. Therefore in order to prevent market failure, is there not a stronger argument for some form of regulation that will drive the renewables market and improve technologies? Is there not a danger that those technologies might not improve through voluntary buy-in and grants alone? Is there a need to pump-prime the market?

Mr Everall: I fully understand your argument. There is a more pressing case for greater regulation of renewables than there is for information technology, where the market has done an excellent job. A great deal of careful thought is required before one becomes too prescriptive about the use of certain types of renewables. The market may not deliver. I attach some hope to the fact that people as a whole, and children in particular, seem much more concerned about the future of the planet than they were 10 years ago. Even if people do not want to save money by improving the energy efficiency of their homes, more and more are concerned about the state of the planet. Whether that is enough to make the changes that are required remains to be seen.

The Chairperson: In an earlier answer, you said that you were not convinced that we could achieve the carbon-neutral target by 2016. Does that not indicate that, without being prescriptive, we must be proactive in encouraging and developing capacity?

Mr Everall: Indeed, much more work must be done. As I said, some of that work is going on in England, at least. I am still not convinced that we will get there, but much more work is being done now than two years ago.

The Chairperson: What helpful and constructive work can we do on the Bill to help us to achieve the targets? How can we change the regulations to improve on what has been done in England and Wales?

Mr Everall: You can continue to raise targets in the regulations. You propose to issue guidance documents, so you can continue to develop the guidance to show people how to achieve targets. You can work with industry and with others to produce bigger, better guidance. The faster the industry can develop the

technology, the faster you can tighten the regulations and raise the standards. Members may be familiar with the standard assessment procedure (SAP) ratings, which are energy-efficiency ratings on houses. For example, you can say that, instead of new houses having a rating of 80 on the SAP scale, you will want them to have a rating of 85 next year. However, you must be convinced that the technology exists to deliver that rate economically. That is a long-winded way of saying that the way in which you appear to be developing the regulatory system should provide the basis for achieving the results that you want.

Mr F McCann: It has been recommended to the Committee that further consideration be given to requiring approval of plans by local council building control before commencement of work. That approach has been taken in England and Wales, and there seems to be division between rural and city councils on how that is handled.

Mr Everall: I am not sure that I see that distinction. There are two ways in which one can carry out building work in England and Wales. One can either submit plans to the local authority, which is required to issue a decision on the plans within a certain time; I think that it is five weeks, but I do not have the regulations at my fingertips. If those plans are approved, the work can proceed. We also have what is called the building-notice system, which was intended for simple work, whereby one gives 48 hours' notice to the local authority that one intends to start work. One does not have to submit any plans. The local authority will inspect the work from time to time.

I mentioned earlier that a review of the building control system is ongoing in England and Wales. One of our arguments to Government is that the building-notice system has been misused. Works such as loft conversions or complicated extensions that can require a great deal of building-control officer time to ensure that they are done correctly are being carried out on building notices, without any plans having been submitted. I do not know how prevalent loft conversions are in Northern Ireland, but many people in London and other parts of England like to convert lofts into living accommodation. There are all sorts of issues to do with structural safety, means of escape and so on. If plans are not submitted for approval by the local authority, the local authority can find it difficult to ensure that problems are corrected as the building work progresses. That system has been misused by some developers.

Although that was not a very precise answer to your question, it may give the Committee a flavour of the problems that we face.

Mr F McCann: I am a member of Belfast City Council, which is inundated with requests for

permission for loft conversions. Some of the building control officers would have difficulties if the system was changed, because their work would probably pile up.

Mr Everall: LABC is putting together evidence that English building regulations actually cost more than submitting plans, even though they are supposed to be more straightforward. You may be aware that in Scotland a warrant is required before starting work. However, in England and Wales one can start work without any prior approval. I am not sure that it is necessary to go quite as far as the Scottish model, but we are concerned about how the system works in England and Wales.

Mr McQuillan: It has been recommended that our Bill include powers to create regulations to control dangerous buildings and on the demolition of buildings. What is the position in England and Wales?

Mr Everall: Those areas are not controlled under building regulations. There are powers under the Buildings Act (1984) — the principal statute under which building regulations are made in England and Wales — but there are also separate provisions that go back to Victorian public health legislation. Local authorities have powers to take action if a building is considered to be dangerous; either by taking direct action themselves or requiring others to do so. It has never been necessary, and I have never heard it suggested, that in England and Wales those powers need to be contained in building regulations. They seem to work well as separate legislation.

Mr McQuillan: I am not sure whether we have separate legislation here or whether we would need to include that in the Bill. Do you know if that is the case?

Mr Everall: I do not know if you have separate legislation in Northern Ireland for dangerous structures or for demolition; if you do not, perhaps you should consider it.

The Chairperson: I think that we have separate legislation, but I am not sure of the details. The Committee can follow up on that separately, as it is any interesting point.

Mr Everall: We should not have to spend a long time filling out building regulation applications while deciding what to do with a dangerous structure. It is an emergency power and should be used as such. That is why it is separate from building regulation legislation.

Ms Purvis: There have been backland developments in Northern Ireland to which emergency and service vehicles have been unable to gain access. At present, no statutory agency appears to have the power to ensure that proper access is available. Has that been an issue in England and Wales and, if so, how have you dealt with it?

Mr Everall: The issue has arisen in England and Wales and part B of the regulations — I appreciate that your letters are different; in England and Wales we use the same letters as in the Republic of Ireland — deals with fire safety. That requires that there should be access for the Fire Service in all developments, and that was specifically written into the regulations, I believe in 1991.

Ms Purvis: There was a recommendation that the Northern Ireland Bill should require the Department to work with counterparts in England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland to harmonise building regulations. That would apply to the technical content and to the time of introduction. Do you have any views on that?

Mr Everall: It would be desirable where it can be achieved. One of the reasons that I attended the Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee and why colleagues from Northern Ireland attended our buildings regulation advisory committee in London was so that we could compare notes. Often, regulations are introduced in England and Wales and similar changes are made a few years later in Northern Ireland.

I strongly support the principle of harmonisation, particularly for developers who work in different parts of the United Kingdom. It would be good — although we have never achieved it in Scotland — if type approvals that have been agreed in England and Wales were also accepted in Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, its feasibility remains to be seen due to different methods of construction. Furthermore, there is perhaps a tendency to move away from harmonisation because of the effects of devolution.

The Scottish regulations differ from the English and Welsh ones, partly because Scottish politicians believe that they do not need to do the same as England and Wales. I am sure that there will also be issues in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish policies on radon are somewhat different from regulatory requirements in England and Wales, and that may be due to geological differences.

I would like to see harmonisation achieved wherever possible, as that would help the construction industry, although there may be occasions where the different parts of the UK need different requirements.

The Chairperson: Where an applicant deals with building controls application of the regulations at any stage of the planning consideration in England and Wales, they can ask for a determination from the Department. There is no provision here for an applicant to approach the Department until building control has concluded and rejected the plans.

Other witnesses have recommended to the Committee that, with the introduction of a guidance-based documents approach, a system of determination should also be established similar that which exists in

England and Wales. How has that process worked in practice, and has the fact that the applicant can appeal at any stage of the process been beneficial in your view?

Mr Everall: The process has worked in principle. I used to be the senior civil servant responsible for running the determination of appeals system. The time that it took to get a decision meant that the system was inefficient, and consequently the procedure was rarely used. In theory, it was a very useful system to have, but it was not of much use.

The Government's consultation paper on the future of building control consultation asks whether LABC, together with the equivalent private-sector organisation, could set up its own mediation system for disputes. LABC is looking into that possibility. If there were a dispute at any stage — for example at the plan-checking stage if the developer thinks that the plans comply with the building regulations and the building control officer thinks that they do not — perhaps the decision could be issued to an LABC-run technical panel that would have the right to make the final determination. The Government are consulting on that. I imagine that there would have to be some kind of statutory basis for that to work. It is recognised that the system of determination and appeals has not worked very well in England and Wales, and a better system needs to be found. The present system of dispute resolution has not worked well — a solution needs to be found.

The Chairperson: Recently, there has been a resurgence in development and pressure on the housing market, although that may be characteristic of here. The Committee has been given evidence of backland developments where there has been difficulty in getting access for emergency vehicles. There appears to be no body with the statutory powers to address that issue. How have you dealt with that in England and Wales?

Mr Everall: As I said to your colleague, there are requirements in our regulations which require there to be access for the Fire Service for example. If an estate is being developed, a road must be included that is big enough for a fire engine to drive down. It has been tackled to that extent in our building regulations.

The Chairperson: Has there been any difficulty in enforcing that requirement?

Mr Everall: No; that requirement has been accepted by developers. I used to say when I was responsible for making the regulations that people used to kick and scream about how the regulations were the end of the world as they knew it. I remember when we first introduced disability access requirements to the building regulations that householders said that they would never be able to build houses.

The day after the regulations came into force, we did not hear another squeak. People just complied with

the regulations; perhaps that is human nature. I have no evidence that the requirements on access to backlands or the Fire Service are not working. I do not know of any cases where that was not provided.

The Chairperson: On behalf of the Committee, I thank you for your interesting presentation, although there are issues that Committee members will want to follow up through correspondence.

Mr Everall: I apologise that I did not send any written evidence in advance, but I was not sure how best I could help the Committee. Please feel free to follow up any issues with me.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much indeed.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

30 April 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)
Mr Mervyn Storey (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Declan O'Loan
Mr Peter Weir

Witness:

Mr Noel Williams } Energy Saving Trust

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): The Committee will now hear from the Energy Saving Trust (EST). The usual warning about switching off mobile phones applies because Hansard is recording the session. The Energy Saving Trust has provided the Committee with a briefing paper along with further statistical information. I welcome Noel Williams, who is the head of the Energy Saving Trust, and I invite him to make his presentation.

Mr Noel Williams (Energy Saving Trust): Thank you, Chairperson.

The Chairperson: Noel, if you are proposing changes to the Bill, it may be helpful if you stop at each proposed change in order to give members the opportunity to explore it rather than our having to trawl backwards and forwards over the same territory.

Before we move on to the trust's presentation, I want to refer to a point made by Dr Farry regarding the projected number of people who would be living in new houses over a time. I thought that that was an interesting perspective and is a matter that we should

put to our own Department. Is the Committee in agreement that we should do that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Mr Williams, would you like to make your presentation.

Mr Williams: Thank you for the invitation to talk to the Committee.

If I may, I will take a couple of minutes to brief the Committee on some of the points in the evidence on microgeneration, building regulations, the consultation on policy planning statement 18 — I am aware that that relates to another Department, but it is worthy mentioning — and the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill itself. I have provided members with background information about the trust, so you will be pleased that I not will bore you with that today. I have brought two charts showing where the trust wants to be and the market transformation curve.

It may be useful if I comment on what the countries adjacent to our two islands are doing, although I am aware that you have had evidence from representatives from those areas. I will offer the trust's view on what Northern Ireland should be doing; and, finally, I will be pleased to answer members' questions.

The first paper is about microgeneration and building regulations. We have said for some time that it is vital that any amendments to building regulation should aim to ensure that the fabric of the building is robust and energy-efficient. Energy-efficient measures are likely to last for the lifetime of a property. For our statistical analysis, we work on the basis that energy-efficiency measures will last about 60 years because of segregation and suchlike in the building, but the house may last much longer. Therefore it is important not to treat the building of integrated renewables in isolation from the energy demand in a building; energy supply is logically linked to the energy demand in buildings.

The key to delivering sustainable energy solutions is to reduce the demand for energy. That can be done with energy-efficiency measures. Energy efficiency is more cost-effective than renewable technologies but, as the Chairperson said earlier, renewables could become a very valuable tool in future.

Our research suggests that regulating renewables has huge potential and this, in turn, will encourage microgeneration. However microgeneration must be part of the mix and not the panacea. It is important to lead by example, which I hope our Government will do. Although microgeneration cannot be a substitute for reducing heat loss in new homes, technologies will be required to deliver carbon savings as Northern Ireland moves towards zero carbon heating; a concept, you will not be surprised to hear, that I will be recommending today.

I have sent the Committee our response to the consultation of draft PPS 18. The response demonstrates our support for the Executive's desire to facilitate and encourage greater integration of renewable energy and for the technologies — both in the design of new buildings and through the appropriate retro-fit for the technologies in existing properties.

Recent research that we have undertaken for the Renewables Advisory Board highlights the role of the planning system and the role it can play in facilitating the uptake of microgeneration technologies. The research shows that if the planning process makes the adoption of such technologies easier, people will not find it too difficult to jump through a particular hoop.

Draft PPS18 rightly encourages low-carbon renewable energy supply. Unfortunately, it does not mention the importance of reducing energy demand and considering this in tandem with energy supply. After all, it makes little sense to build and install a generating capacity if much of the output is wasted through the fabric of the building. There is also a financial issue: if capacity is lowered, it will cost less if the demand is low.

There is no mention of a building's geographic orientation in draft PPS 18. Indeed, the Committee might ask why would there be? However, it would be a positive step if all our buildings were orientated to facilitate renewables. I appreciate that it would be impossible for all new buildings to have a south-facing aspect, but if the properties are to be orientated from east to west, let us have a roof that can accommodate renewables. Let our housing stock be renewables-ready in the same way that our televisions are digital-ready as we move down the renewables stream.

I wish to comment on clauses 1, 4, 5, 7 and 12, particularly clauses 1 and 7.

We welcome the provision in clause 1 for building regulations to be able to regulate the energy performance of building, and we believe this concept to be important. Northern Ireland has not yet set a target date by which all new builds should be zero-carbon. That should be introduced and a target of 2016 established. Moreover, it is important that changes to building regulations are seen as an intermediate stage towards the creation of zero-carbon buildings.

Under the code for sustainable homes being adopted in England and Wales, microgeneration becomes necessary in all codes above code 4. England and Wales plan to bring this into building regulations in 2013.

Code level 3, for example, needs microgeneration in most flats and becomes part of building regulations in 2010. Developers should adopt energy-efficiency measures where possible so that there will be no need for universal microgeneration. There will not be such

need in England and Wales until 2013. However, we encourage developers to aspire to codes 3 and 4 before the standards are introduced in building regulations.

Clause 7 is about the power to require or carry out testing. Testing in airtightness is important for energy saving. A survey commissioned by the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes showed that one third of new homes failed the indicative airtightness levels set out under the previous building regulations regime, part L (2002) for England and Wales, which is the equivalent to part F in Northern Ireland. It is unclear to what extent those findings will be transferred to Northern Ireland.

It is sensible to have a robust compliance and enforcement regime that involves testing and that ensures that new-built homes meet specifications and contain the necessary design features to make them truly low-carbon.

I have distributed two charts to members. The first is entitled "Where We Want To Be" and it maps a horizontal timeline against a vertical measurement of carbon emissions. The Committee will see where the line starts to divide at 2010. If we do absolutely nothing from that year to 2050, we will run along the top line, which forecasts that emissions in the UK will rise to between 140 and 160 on the graph's carbon measurement scale. Under present forecasts we are doing a certain amount, but only enough to get us down to the second line, which dips under the measurement of 140 on the scale of emissions.

The important thing that I want to highlight is the depth shown up between the top line and that represented by the potential impact of the energy-efficiency sector. There is so much still to be done in energy efficiency, and that gap stays static after 2030.

Much more also needs to be done on renewables, which is illustrated by a further widening on the graph to potentially even lower carbon emission levels. Below that, there is a line representing the effect of CO₂ sequestration, which means burying material in oil or gas fields. Then hydrogen, which has a line of its own, has to be considered; I hope that you will not ask me about that because I do not know anything about hydrogen. However, it is a technology that will find its feet in due course.

The Chairperson: We will try to resist the temptation.

Mr Williams: Thank you. *[Laughter.]*

The second graph shows "The Market Transformation Curve", which reflects what the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust are trying to achieve. The "R&D" on the lower left-hand side of the graph represents the Carbon Trust's input. We deal with the domestic side and we have roles in demonstration and early adopter grants through

schemes such as the Reconnect programme. We conduct marketing, have energy advice centres, and inform the public. In Northern Ireland the Energy Savings Trust advice centre had contact with 67,000 households in 2007-08.

We hope that the market will move up the curve on the graph. We look to people — such as those on the Committee — to draw up regulations that sustain and enliven the industry. The graph peaks with the introduction of a regulation and we eventually get to that low-carbon concentration.

Dr Farry: Does the horizontal axis on “The Market Transformation Curve” represent the percentage of people who are involved in renewables?

Mr Williams: Yes. We think that that curve is reasonable. People will not act unless we demonstrate the technologies and hope that those who can afford to do so take it up. Our role is to educate, advise and encourage take-up through our marketing and advice network.

May I highlight what is being done in some of our neighbouring countries?

For example, as the Committee may already know, the code for sustainable homes was launched in England in December 2006. It sets a new standard for sustainable design, and, since April 2007, the developer of any new home in England can choose to be assessed against its criteria. The code measures the sustainability of a new home against certain criteria and has levels or stars that range from one to six. It sets minimum standards for energy and water use at every level, and it replaces the old eco-homes scheme.

The eco-homes scheme was an interesting wee standard, which was a bit wacky at times — one could put six or seven bird’s nests boxes in your house and trade that against energy, whereas now the sustainable standard is such that energy is set, which is much better. The code sets sustainable design performance criteria in nine areas: energy, carbon dioxide emissions, water, materials and surface water run-off. A code level is then awarded based on how the mandatory minimum has been achieved.

The building regulations were last updated in England and Wales in 2005, in Northern Ireland in 2006, and in Scotland in 2007. The Committee has just heard that in the Republic of Ireland the regulations were last updated in 2007 and that they come into effect in July this year. Code levels correspond to the percentage by which the standards have been exceeded. For example, code level 1 is awarded when a standard has been achieved that is 10% above the standard. Similarly, the percentage for level 2 is 18%; for level 3 it is 25%; for level 4 it is 44%; and for level 5 it is 100%. Code level 6 means that zero carbon has

been achieved. All social housing must be built to code level 3.

Our position is that developers should aim for energy efficiency where they can, so there is no need for universal microgeneration until 2013. However, we encourage developers to aspire to code level 3 or 4 before the building regulations.

The National Assembly for Wales has signed up to the code for sustainable homes and has set a target that all newbuilds in Wales will be zero carbon by 2011. That is an ambitious target, but that is a matter for them, not for me. They define zero carbon as being code level 5, although with some commitment to extend it to code level 6. They say that there are certain issues with the higher rating, but I do not know what they are. To enable the National Assembly for Wales to make progress in that area, the proposal is that the building regulations be devolved to the Welsh Government in the same way as responsibility for our regulations has been devolved.

Unlike England and Wales, the Scottish Government have not as yet set a target date for achieving zero-carbon newbuild. However, recent policy documents from the Scottish Government suggest that they want to move towards zero-carbon newbuild. The Scottish Government convened an expert panel to advise on the development of low-carbon buildings for Scotland, and a report entitled ‘A low carbon building standards strategy for Scotland’ was published earlier this year.

The panel recommended that new buildings should be zero carbon — as regards space and water heating, lighting and ventilation — by 2016-17, if practical, and that there should be two intermediate stages as they move along the road to achieve zero-carbon buildings. One stage was the 2010 change in energy standards, which involves low-carbon buildings. Another stage would be the 2013 change in energy standards, which involves very low-carbon buildings, to use their terminology. Percentages are provided: low carbon means that energy standards should deliver carbon dioxide savings of 30% more than 2007 standards. Very low carbon means that energy standards should deliver carbon dioxide savings of 60% more than 2007 standards. The target is to achieve zero-carbon buildings in 2016, and total-life zero carbon buildings by 2030. The latter is an interesting standard, which means that there would be zero carbon from the construction, maintenance and demolition processes. Thus, very high standards have been set.

In addition, the Scottish Government have introduced their Scottish Planning Policy (SPP6) Renewable Energy, which sets out an expectation that all future applications proposing development with a total floor value of 500 sq m or more should incorporate on-site and low-carbon equipment that

provides at least 15% of the energy. That percentage is similar to that of the Republic.

The report referenced comments that the requirement was to be reviewed after 2013 and will be removed from the regulations by then. This is because it will have been achieved by that date.

The Republic of Ireland will be fresh in your memory due to the preceding presentation. I made a couple of interesting observations as I looked through the material which was distributed. Ms Neary mentioned part L1 of the Building Control Act 1990, which states:

“The amount of CO2 emissions associated with this energy use insofar as it is reasonably practicable”

That is a bit wishy-washy, and should be made more robust. The Act also states that:

“primary energy consumption and related CO2 insofar as is reasonably practicable”

Ms Neary was talking about the 10 kW hours per square metre per annum statistic. That is a big, long technical term but leaving that aside, a reasonable portion of the energy consumed to meet the energy performance of a dwelling is provided by renewable energy sources. Scotland is setting a target and a percentage, which is interesting. Statements that include the phrase “where appropriate” should be tightened up. I have references to the 86% efficiency of boilers, but those statistics have already been discussed, so I shall move on.

I understand from my colleagues in Sustainable Energy Ireland that the code for sustainable homes is on the agenda of the Republic of Ireland, which has also been discussed.

I am nearing the end; I am moving onto the subject of Northern Ireland. Any consideration of changes to building regulations, including microgeneration in newbuild, should be in the intermediate stages on the way towards zero-carbon buildings. As such, the energy demand and efficiency need to be considered in tandem with supply and microgeneration. Energy efficiency is the best value for money, but that may change. Building regulations must also be used to ensure that existing homes are energy-efficient. When boilers are replaced for example, they should be replaced with the most efficient options.

There is no doubt that as the cost of microgeneration technologies approaches that of conventional technologies, it will fall, as, for example, the price of PCs has fallen. The least efficient models must be taken off the market.

Look at what has happened in white goods with the EU energy label scheme — A-rated machines have become so popular that one can no longer buy washing machines that are c-rated or below. We have

had to introduce A+ and A++ standards; that is the way forward. Our research shows that regulation on building regulations can encourage microgeneration. The help there by preparing dwellings and renewables.

Northern Ireland has not signed up to the code for sustainable homes, although it should or at least adopt an equivalent mechanism. There is no reason to follow the lead of other countries in any way, but any equivalent mechanism developed would have to be tight.

I am pleased to announce the extension of the low-carbon buildings programme to June 2010. Northern Ireland residents will be able to access £10 million to install micro- or renewable technologies. By doing that, they can play a vital role in tackling the global challenge of climate change and save money in the long run. The grants are not as lucrative as the Reconnect programme, but they are available and I have provided a table that you will see in due course.

Mr Beggs: Your evidence suggested that energy efficiency is more cost-effective than microgeneration and that changes to the fabric of a building will last for many years; they are not a short-term measure. If we want to help the environment, I assume that you would recommend that we should consider increasing insulation standards rather than making microgeneration mandatory. Is that a correct interpretation of what you said?

Mr Williams: Insulation standards were increased. If you were to ask members of the public whether they had loft insulation, they would probably say, “Yes”. They might also guess that its thickness is about a hand’s width, although it should be 11 in. The challenge is to encourage people to top-up their insulation to keep energy in the building. That is what we are trying to achieve, Mr Beggs.

Mr Beggs: I appreciate that insulation standards have increased significantly. However, given the changes to building regulations and the EU directives, further efficiency of buildings will be required in future. If we were to consider enhancing our standards before those requirements come into effect, should we examine insulation before we consider microgeneration?

Mr Williams: We must consider them in tandem. We must increase insulation and bring microgeneration in when it is required. It is not a matter of choosing one method or the other; we must join the two together.

Mr Beggs: I note that your submission says that your energy-efficiency work is funded not from the Northern Ireland block grant but from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and BERR. What is BERR?

Mr Williams: BERR is the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; it was previously the Department for Trade and Industry. It is

the equivalent of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Beggs: I was interested to note that routes to renewable energy grants are still open. However, I find it confusing that several bodies handle grants and that several different grants are available. Have any members of the public or organisations voiced concern about there being multiple routes and multiple schemes because that is not an efficient way of providing encouragement and assistance?

Mr Williams: On the contrary, the Energy Saving Trust has a one-stop shop now. Phoenix Natural Gas — I became a customer of Phoenix only a few days before the price increase — uses our number, as do Northern Ireland Electricity and the Housing Executive. The Northern Ireland consumers ring us, and we steer them through the grant process, so the confusion has gone away. Reconnect can be contacted via a different number, but the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment decided to do that. Normally, there is little confusion. As far as the public are concerned, if a grant exists and we can point them to it, they will gladly apply for it.

The Chairperson: Noel, the Renewables Advisory Board in England recently called upon the Government to stimulate demand for renewables in order to build capacity and avoid a supply gap by the due date for zero-carbon homes. It pointed to a mandatory renewable requirement as one approach for achieving that. What is your view?

Mr Williams: I hope that we introduce mandatory renewables in future. I agree with the decision of the Minister of Finance and Personnel not to make microgeneration mandatory from 1 April 2008. That was the right decision for the present. However, in future, we will have to make microgeneration mandatory. If we do not make microgeneration mandatory, some people will try to avoid it. One could argue that the market will get there eventually, and that may be so, but we can make it so.

The Chairperson: Earlier, you described an approach with intermediate stages. Do you anticipate guidance being issued in the foreseeable future?

Mr Williams: If the Government give enough notice of the requirement to the industry — for example, if it was to be introduced in 2013 — and we made everyone aware of it, there would be no excuse. We would gear up for the change and keep the market energised, if I may use that expression. When microgeneration becomes mandatory, people will be ready for it.

Dr Farry: What should we opt for in the Bill? Should we make microgeneration compulsory or should we simply facilitate the use of renewable

sources of energy in a set target and specify microgeneration as one way of achieving it?

Mr Williams: If we are to get where we want to be by 2050, we will have to make microgeneration mandatory, and we will have to do that by 2020. Right now is not the time, but that time is not far off.

Dr Farry: Should microgeneration be mandatory for every household or is it a combination of individual and collective approaches, whether for an apartment building or an entire development, for example, when it comes to erecting a wind turbine?

Mr Williams: It is a combination of both. A fair proportion of houses are self-built, and if the regulations make solar or water power mandatory, the house builder must comply accordingly. There is an argument, with house prices being what they are, that such regulations add another £3,000 to the price of the building. However, the savings that can be made over the life of the house make that figure pale into insignificance.

Dr Farry: You made the comparison between information technology and the dramatic improvements in the performance of various technologies over the years. There is a need for massive investment in research, development and innovation in order to bring down the costs of renewable technologies. The IT market took care of itself because consumers demanded more efficient devices. That may not be the case with renewables; hence the need for more regulation.

It strikes me that we are approaching these issues home by home or country by country. Each of the four jurisdictions in the UK is doing its own thing, as is the Republic of Ireland. Those interventions are designed to pump-prime the market. However, the market for the supply of renewable technology devices and the related research and development does not take place on a self-contained basis in those five jurisdictions; it takes place on a European or global scale. How can each jurisdiction plug into the wider regulatory picture, and how does that relate to the need to pump-prime the market?

Mr Williams: The various areas of the United Kingdom ought to look at the situation in a different way; however, there are common measures that can be applied. For example, it would be a major step forward if we could get our wind capacity on to the grid instead of using micro wind turbines, for example. I do not have an opinion about micro wind turbines at the moment. We are engaged in a year-long study, which will conclude in June, of 100 urban micro-turbines. A wind turbine on top of a hill in rural Northern Ireland is a winner; I am not so sure whether it would be equally successful attached to the side of my house. Those studies take in the whole country in order to

make the regulation easier so that projects can be made cost-effective in future.

Mr Beggs: I wonder whether any house in Northern Ireland has a wind turbine attached to its gable. I have heard that B& Q did not sell too many of them in Northern Ireland because they did not make economic sense.

The Chairperson: I have never seen one.

Mr Williams: Some people in Northern Ireland have installed micro wind turbines, some of whom are involved in our study. We are taking that into consideration.

Mr Beggs: It would be useful to see the results of that study. In your submission you state that micro-generation at code level 4 will become a requirement of the regulations in England and Wales and that that requirement will be included in building regulations by 2013.

You also said that that will be the case in most flats from 2010. Does that refer to England and Wales too? Is Northern Ireland lagging behind in the regulations compared to what is happening in England and Wales? Perhaps we need more information about code levels.

Mr Williams: I can provide you with that information. I was referring to the code levels for England. The code for sustainable homes is something that we should sign up to because of that standard. Renewable energy is needed to reach code level 4 in the building regulations. The higher the code, the more renewables are needed: the aspect of the building must be right, for example, and there must be solar gain. The Committee, the Department and the Minister must decide whether the code is introduced in this way or by an appropriate mechanism. We suggest that the code can apply as well in Northern Ireland as it does in Wales.

Mr Beggs: You said that code level 4 will be in the building regulations by 2013. Has that been agreed in England, and has it been agreed that it will be implemented in Northern Ireland by that time?

Mr Williams: No; it has not been agreed that it will be implemented in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: Thanks very much, Noel. The Committee finds it necessary from time to time to follow up with written requests for clarification or elaboration from witnesses. I trust that we can do the same with you should the need arise.

Mr Williams: Yes, of course.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

30 April 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)
Mr Mervyn Storey (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Declan O'Loan
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Ms Sarah Neary	}	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr Chris O'Grady		

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): We will move smartly on and continue this evidence session. I welcome Chris O'Grady, head of the building standards section, and Sarah Neary, senior building standards adviser from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the Republic. You are very welcome. I know that you listened to the previous witness, so you will be aware of what was said.

The Committee is particularly interested in the role of your Department in relation to building regulations and the South's experience of implementing similar building regulations. We are also interested to hear about your experience of renewable energy sources in building regulations.

I invite you to address the Committee.

Mr Chris O'Grady (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government):
Thank you very much. With your permission, I would

be grateful if both of us could address the Committee initially and then take questions together.

Like Paul Everall, we are grateful for the invitation from the Committee. I say that on behalf of our Minister, who came into office last June. He is very strongly of the view that although we come here as his officials to assist the Committee's deliberations, we also come here to aid our learning process in order to sharpen our focus on the challenges that we face.

None of us has the monopoly of knowledge on how to meet the challenges that face us all. We are very grateful to be here, and we found the last session with Paul Everall particularly helpful. Sarah will address some of the points that members raised in that session and give the Committee a flavour of where we stand in the Irish context.

We submitted four written pieces of evidence to the Committee. One was a general note on the building regulations system in the South of Ireland. Essentially, under our Building Control Acts of 1990 and 2007, responsibility for complying with the regulations rests with the owner or the builder. Our enforcement regime consists of 37 building control authorities. By agreement with the city and county managers across the state, the target enforcement rate for buildings that are subject to commencement orders lodged with the building control authorities is 12% to 15%.

That might sound quite modest in comparison to the more blanket imprint that the building control system here has, but it reflects the resources that are available to us. We have six-monthly reports from all building control authorities, and the indications are that there is 97% compliance across those 37 authorities to meet that 12% to 15% target.

In our written evidence, we also tried to give the Committee a brief flavour of each of the clauses of the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill and how they correspond with our system. Due to the Committee's interest in the section of the Bill that details renewable energy technologies, we have also provided a short note on the new laws signed by our Minister on Christmas Eve 2007 as part of the Programme for Government.

These new laws seek to secure an improvement of 40% in primary energy consumption and a reduction of 40% in CO₂ emissions. Both targets must be achieved. The applicable date is 1 July 2008, and that allows for the small transition that the industry demanded.

A member asked about a 1973 building design that could still be granted planning permission despite not complying with present energy efficiency standards.

If builders in the South have planning permission before 1 July of this year, they can avoid the new target but only if the building is substantially complete by 30 June 2008. "Substantially complete" means that the

four walls of the building must have been constructed. Other than that, our new targets and standards must be complied with — subject to that transitional period.

I know that the Assembly had a debate on whether renewables should be mandatory, but our Minister has taken the view that our building standards should contain a mandatory renewables element. We have had extensive engagement with house builders and other elements of the construction industry, and they have informed us that we must empower them with backup manuals, guidelines and access to the durable and reliable products that the building regulations require them to have. We are engaged in sustained dialogue with the construction industry to help it to meet the targets and obligations that are required by law.

We have also given Committee members two notes on the link between the state's building control system and the planning system. There are a couple of reasons for the strong link between the two. First, our Minister is responsible for both systems. Secondly, the South has a joined-up approach to the problems and challenges that we face because of climate change and the need for a planning system that will, where possible, provide for exemptions for dwelling-based micro-renewables. Those exemptions, under the planning regime, should be extended to the industrial, commercial and agricultural sectors.

Our first note informs the Committee of the law relating to micro-renewables that was introduced in February 2007; our second provides a flavour of the proposals that the Minister will introduce in Parliament in the South next month. A debate on renewables of greater capacity for use in the commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors will take place in June.

Last month, an energy summit — the first of its kind to be held in Europe — was held in Dublin. The Taoiseach, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Minister for Transport, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food — due to her interest in biofuels and forestry — joined 300 captains of industry in Dublin to send out the message that there is a joined-up approach in the South and that building control is only one — albeit a significant — element of that.

Although our Minister brought in 40% improvements for new dwellings on Christmas Eve, he announced, at the energy forum, that he would move to a 60% improvement for new dwellings in 2010 and that he would work with the state's Building Regulations Advisory Body — which was established under the Building Control Act 1990 — to deal with new targets for buildings other than dwellings. He said that the targets would be realisable and ambitious. They have not been articulated yet because he is

anxious to consult the industry. He also talked about his desire to move towards zero-carbon emissions for all buildings by 2016, which ties in with what Paul Everall said. He did not give that date at the meeting, but he announced it at his party conference.

He also said that he would use all the arms at his disposal. Considering his important imprint on housing policy across the state and his significant grant aid to local authorities, he will be asking them to come forward with demonstration projects in their housing programmes for the use of renewables and movement towards zero-carbon homes in local authorities. As he is responsible for social and voluntary housing, he will elaborate on the new strategies that have yet to emerge for the retro-fitting of those houses in the state, with a view to addressing the challenge of new buildings, other than dwellings, and the state's building stock over time.

Sarah will pick up on some of the points that were raised in the previous discussion.

Ms Sarah Neary (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government): Thank-you for inviting us to the Committee meeting; it is a privilege to be here.

Building regulations are not harmonised, but there are strong communication links between the various jurisdictions. Indeed, we hold islands meetings in various locations to discuss elements of the building regulations. I am member of the group that examines structures. Representatives of the Scottish Building Standard Agency, the Department of Finance and Personnel, and communities and local government also attend the meetings. The meetings are a useful way of keeping up to date with what is happening in each jurisdiction and learning of any changes that may be imminent. All parties in the South appreciate that high level of communication.

It will be worthwhile for us to provide an Irish perspective on some of the issues that have been raised.

Mr Beggs asked how new houses built to 1973 building control standards should be dealt with. When we review any part of the building regulations, we implement transitional arrangements. Building work that commences after a certain date must comply with the new regulations; and building work that commences before that date must be “substantially complete” in order to avoid the regulations. As Chris O’Grady said, “substantially complete” means that the four walls of the house have been constructed.

Our building control system is quite different from that in Northern Ireland, and England and Wales; we do not have an approval type system. Builders require a cert of compliance with the building regulation granted through the conveyance and legal system. The cert is a building professional's opinion — generally

given after completion of a survey — that a new building complies with the relevant regulations. As Chris also explained, there is a requirement for 12% to 15% of all commencement notices to be inspected in each local authority.

The provision of grants for renewable energy systems — and, indeed, mandatory introduction — has been discussed today. Under the Greener Homes scheme, we have had a grant system for the past five years; and there has been a huge take-up of those grants. The grants provide about one third of the cost of biomass boilers, wood pellet stoves, solar panels, heat pumps — any type of renewable energy.

The Chairperson: Were grants provided for any type of renewable energy system? Was that left to the discretion of the owner or the installer?

Ms Neary: To be eligible for the grant, an approved installer has to be used and the renewable energy system has to be on the list of products that meet the required standard.

Part L “Conservation of Fuel and Energy” of the building regulations for new dwellings makes it mandatory for approximately 10% of the total energy used by a typical semi-detached house to be renewable. The exact figures are 10 kilowatt hours per metre squared per year for heat energy; and 4 kilowatt hours per metre squared per year for electrical energy. The mandatory requirement for electrical energy is smaller because producing electricity is more efficient — and has fewer distribution losses — than heat energy. Alternatively, combined heat and power (CHP) plants can be used. A CHP plant that provides energy for an apartment block or a district heating system complies with renewable energy regulations, even though it is not a renewable fuel source.

We have moved from the grant scheme to the mandatory system, which is in line with our programme for improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. As Chris said, new houses have 40% lower heat energy demand than buildings in the 2005 regulations. We intend to achieve a 60% target by 2010 and eventually move towards very low or zero carbon housing. The system needed to be lubricated in order for renewable energy systems to become a larger component. All aspects in this round of provision relate to part L of the building regulations.

One of the first questions was whether we have experienced any problems during the implementation of the building-control system. The Building Control Act 2007 made several amendments to the Building Control Act 1990. The amendments indicate the four main areas where problems arose, which I will explain briefly.

There was a general problem of compliance with part M, which deals with access for people

with disabilities. The amendments provided for the introduction of disability-access certificates. At commencement-notice stage, developers must produce a set of drawings that show how part-M requirements have been incorporated and can be seen to be part of the overall design of the building rather than simply tagged on at the end.

New regulations introduced the registration of architects. That was done because various people were calling themselves architects and offering services such as planning permission and building control. Now, however, the title is confined to people who are trained architects or who, under several other clauses, have had their professional capability assessed by a board.

As we explained, under the building control system there is only one building control officer in most local authorities, and those officers are overworked. To ease the system, the method by which enforcements are carried out has been changed. Therefore rather than issue indictments, summary prosecutions are brought before the district court, which is an easier process. Fines and fees have been increased, so officers get help on both sides and they have more teeth.

Amendments were also made for the regularisation of procedures that relate to fire certificates. When a building’s form is changed during construction, its fire certificate needs to be revised and resubmitted. Previously, the procedure for that did not exist. Those are some of the issues that have been dealt with.

The Chairperson: Your comments have been helpful.

Mr Weir: Thank you for your presentation. One issue that the last witness raised was false information, whether mistaken or deliberate.

Clause 11 contains powers of criminal prosecution for false information that are similar to those in the Republic. It seems to be a universal problem — one of the downsides of human nature. Can you expand on the success of prosecutions for giving false information? Are there any changes that we should make?

Ms Neary: I do not believe that there have been any prosecutions for giving false information; there may have been a few prosecutions for building control, although I would not swear to it. Generally, problems have been resolved on a case-by-case basis. Cases of misinformation have not been pursued through the courts.

Mr Weir: Does the power act as a deterrent? Has it enabled building control officers, particularly on matters that are dealt with locally on a case-by-case basis, to tell people that they must play ball or go to court? Does that ensure compliance with the regulations?

Ms Neary: The Act gives a building control officer certain leverage in implementing that power.

Mr O'Grady: There has been modest enforcement. In a debate on building control in 2006, Members of Parliament complained about the lack of enforcement and the legislation's lack of teeth.

The then Minister wrote to all city and county managers. He cited all potential breaches of the legislation and asked them to redouble their effort to increase enforcement to between 12% and 15% and to note the possibility of prosecution. He also informed them of his intention to increase the fines substantially, which he did in 2007. For example, the summary conviction fine will increase from £800 to €5,000, and the fine for conviction on indictment will increase from £10,000 to €50,000. In his letter the Minister stated that, for the first time, fines imposed by courts would provide an income stream for local authorities and that the expenses that they incurred in bringing prosecutions would be recoupable from the perpetrators.

Mr Weir: That was the incentive for local authorities to be proactive.

Mr O'Grady: Yes.

Mr O'Loan: The new part L includes regulations that new dwellings must achieve at least a 40% reduction in primary energy consumption and a 40% reduction in related carbon dioxide emissions. I was particularly struck by the fact that the use of renewable energy sources will become mandatory. The Committee has debated at length whether that should be the case in the North too. However, the significant weight of evidence, in addition to the views of the Minister and professional sources, was against that option.

I also note that you estimate the additional cost of adding efficient boilers and improving airtightness in a semi-detached dwelling at €10,000, which is approximately £8,000, but the resulting annual saving will be only €400. By dividing the cost by the annual saving — although that is not the proper calculation — the payback time is 25 years. I am surprised by how long that payback time is. Did those in the building sector, such as developers and estate agents, offer much resistance to part L?

Ms Neary: We received several submissions from stakeholders in the industry requesting that we extend the time frame for the implementation of renewable energy sources. However, in general, part L has been well received by those in the industry, and they are embracing it.

Mr O'Loan's simple calculation of payback time does not tell the full story. I accept that 25 years is a long time, but several factors must be taken into account, such as inflationary measures and whether the price of fuel will outstrip inflation.

However, the total cost of €10,000 can be split between renewables and traditional methods. I do not

have the exact figures but, using solar panels as an example, traditional methods account for about €4,000 and renewables for €6,000. The payback from the more traditional methods is much higher and is easily recouped. We are open about that.

However, there is evidence that renewable products in general tend to come down in price as their use increases. The European Energy Agency says that if a product's market doubles, its cost decreases by approximately 20%, although I can provide the Committee with exact details. The Department wanted to ensure capacity building in the market because renewable energy sources are needed to achieve the target of new housing having a 60% lower heat energy demand than existing buildings standards by 2010. As we progress towards zero-carbon emissions, we will also need to use renewables.

Mr O'Grady: We received 47 submissions when the Minister published his proposals last July. We held a series of meetings with industry stakeholders, and there was no doubt that they were very worried about the imposition of mandatory costs and how they might affect their margins. The Minister made his decision in the context of the Irish Government's obligations to meet EU climate-change targets. He decided that it was necessary to make one, sharp intervention to make people aware of the possibilities of his incremental approach in planning law exemptions for dwelling place microrenewables such as wind turbines and solar panels, gradually moving to the commercial sector, thereby delivering, over time on our obligations to cut carbon emissions. That sea change was a political decision, while acknowledging in discussions with the industry that a 40% reduction could have been achieved by more traditional means.

We were up-front in our discussions with the industry, telling them that insulation could be more airtight but that such was the challenge facing society — and not for just new dwellings, because we have a huge housing stock, much of it of such poor quality that it needs retro-fitting — that this was the time to signal that all our thought processes have to change.

The Chairperson: Much more can be done with newbuilds to achieve dramatic improvements in zero-carbon footprints. The central issue is with existing stock and retro-fitting. The economic equation is now affected by the sharply rising costs of fossil fuel-based energy. That requires the Government to set targets to deal with the industry's concerns about margins, which is a huge consideration for developers. The economic equation is changing almost daily, and if fossil fuel prices continue to escalate, builders using renewables will soon have a marketing ploy for selling the property.

Mr Beggs: I did not realise that renewables must be used in order to reach the new European directive standard of saving an extra 20% in energy use by 2010.

Mr O'Grady: When he came into office, our Minister made a political decision to focus the mind on the sheer extent of the challenge facing society. Targets for this Government and for successive Governments include 30% of electricity to be renewable-sourced by 2020; 30% co-firing of biomass in peat stations by 2015; an energy-efficient action plan leading to a 20% improvement in energy efficiency across the economy by 2020; 5.7% biofuels penetration by 2010; 5% of domestic and commercial heat requirements from renewables by 2010; and up to 400 megawatts of electricity from combined heat and power by 2010.

Those dates are quite close. Those targets were set at the discretion of the national Government and are not linked to EU directives. The Minister, although listening to the industry, felt that it needed a sea change of penetration of the mind, and he convinced the industry that this was the way to proceed. Since then, 400 members of the industry attended a sustainable housing conference at Dublin Castle in January; Homebond, which is the guarantor of new houses in the State, attracted between 400 and 500 people at eight meetings across the State; and an energy summit was held. None of the concerns that were articulated before the Minister introduced the regulations was repeated at those forums. In other words, the industry accepted that the changes were here to stay and that it had to get on with it.

Mr Beggs: I appreciate what the Minister said. However, I want to return to the EU directive on improving energy-efficiency targets for new homes. Will the directive necessitate an increase in the use of renewable energy?

Ms Neary: Are you referring to the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive?

Mr Beggs: You mentioned 2010 and the aim of increasing energy efficiency in homes by 20%, with a requirement on using renewables to achieve that. Have I misunderstood?

Ms Neary: That target relates to our national programme. We used the technical guidance in part L of the Building Regulations 2005 as a baseline for new homes. This year, energy efficiency in homes will increase to 40%; by 2010, we intend to increase that by 20% to 60%.

Mr O'Grady: It is a national target not an EU directive.

Mr Beggs: How did the Department ramp that up to allow the industry to adapt? Will a great deal of new developments suddenly appear as a result? How much

warning has the industry been given about the new targets?

Ms Neary: The new guidance in part L of the Building Regulations 2007 stipulates that the fabric of a building must reduce heat loss as much as possible.

It details the required level and performance of insulation required to reduce heat loss. The guidance also incorporates methods of reducing thermal bridging. Gaps in insulation — allowing a cold surface on the outside to come into contact with a warm surface on the inside — can lead to heat loss, mould growth and condensation, none of which we want. There are accredited and acceptable guidelines on how to reduce thermal bridging, which we now promote. The guidance also provides information on how to reduce air permeability — caused by uncontrolled ventilation — through a building. Mandatory renewables are another step.

On the building services side, it must be ensured that heating systems are properly controlled and that an efficient boiler is put in place. Is that what you are asking me about?

Mr Beggs: The key question is how much warning was the industry given about the mandatory renewable-energy aspect?

Ms Neary: We started the process about this time last year.

Mr O'Grady: The process started last July. The industry asked for a 12-month transitional period, which would have lasted until the end of this year.

However, the Minister decided that it should end on 1 July 2008. That still amounts to a 12-month transitional period. The Building Regulations 2007, Technical Guidance Document, Document Dwellings L, was signed on 24 December 2007. It stipulates that where a planning application is in place before 30 June 2008 and substantial construction has been completed by 30 June 2009, it is exempt from those new standards. That means that there is six-month and a 12-month transitional period. The system clicks in when the new standards become applicable. The real transitional period is six months, but from 1 July next year designers and architects will have to incorporate renewable technologies into their designs, whether up in the roof or with CHP.

It is a tight system with a limited transition period. However, there seems to have been an acceptance that the law has changed and that people have to deal with it. I am not dismissing the concerns of the industry. However, the situation is similar to that which Paul Everall described earlier when he used the analogy that in England people were saying that Armageddon was on the way.

Ms Neary: The industry was heavily involved in public consultations about the regulations last year.

Mr O'Grady: The Minister said that he was keenly aware of what was happening and he told us to listen to the industry. He said that because we made the laws, we must help the industry to articulate them. Since 1 January this year we have been holding talks with the National Standards Authority of Ireland and the Irish Agrément Board in an effort to get renewable products certified. We have been engaged with Enterprise Ireland to get new competence centres linking third-level colleges with the construction sector.

We have been talking to FÁS, the national training authority, and have discovered that, given the pace of change, we can no longer sit in a room and write regulations; we have to engage with stakeholders and with the various support structures in the economy to empower them to comply with the law.

Mr O'Loan: What is in your policy framework for existing buildings?

Mr O'Grady: To answer your question about the situation for existing buildings faithfully, I have to say that we hit the ground running with the appointment of a new Minister last year. Our plan in the Department of the Environment was to achieve 40% improvements in energy efficiency by Christmas Eve. We had no target whatsoever for existing buildings. At the energy forum the Minister announced that he would work with the statutory Building Regulations Advisory Body and that that body will produce realisable and ambitious targets in the short term — by September or December — that will be politically achievable by the Minister. The regulations would be mindful of what the industry has been saying about the initiative on renewables and its concerns that the initiative was overly penal and unnecessary because the 40% target could be achieved without introducing a mandatory level of renewables. We do not have targets, but the Minister is committed to introducing new standards by 2010 that have not been yet articulated. There will be a new 60 % standard for new houses and there will also be new standards for non housing stock — buildings other than dwellings.

Ms Neary: For existing homes, the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources has a fund and is working on a scheme to offer grants to certain areas.

Mr O'Loan: Therefore grants are awarded to provide encouragement.

Ms Neary: Yes, and several counties have been highlighted as target areas to start the process.

Mr O'Loan: Will schemes for groups of houses be a better way forward than schemes for individual houses, and are there mechanisms to encourage that?

Ms Neary: Combined heat and power as an alternative to microrenewables for either a small community or an apartment block was one of the areas in TGDL that we address, concerning a group of buildings rather than individual buildings. Sustainable Energy Ireland had a scheme called House of Tomorrow, through which small estates of between 20 and 100 houses could apply for a grant if they achieved what is now the standard, which is a 40% improvement on the 2005 regulations. That scheme has been operational in the industry for a while, and several estates have been implementing it and achieving the 40% improvement. There is talk that that scheme will continue and that the new standard will be 60%, which would pave the way for our change in regulations in 2010. That applies only to estates of houses or apartments.

Dr Farry: I will start with a very difficult question. Has your Government produced any projections on the percentage of people who will be living in dwellings built after 2008 when the new regulations come in to deal with the distinction between a certain category of regulations for newbuilds and the legacy of people living in existing houses? Has your Government made any projections concerning what percentage of the population will be living in post-2008 buildings by, for example, 2020 or 2050?

Ms Neary: Yes. We have statistics that apply up to 2020, I think, although I do not have them to hand. They show quite a high population increase.

Dr Farry: On reflection, we should ask our own Administration to determine trends to see their effect on how we address the problem through newbuilds.

Your documentation suggests that in the Republic of Ireland legislative building control and planning are controlled by the same Department. What are the advantages of that? In Northern Ireland the Department of Finance and Personnel controls building regulations, whereas the Department of the Environment controls planning. In the Republic of Ireland, how critical is the link between building regulations and planning? Paul Everall said that he considered planning to be potentially more effective than building regulations in devising regulations.

Mr O'Grady: It is essential that the challenge be dealt with holistically; it cannot be tackled on an individual basis. The Minister issued two sets of guidelines on sustainable development and sustainable housing and commented specifically on that matter at the 2008 energy forum.

The Minister is not solely concerned with building control or his plans to introduce new light bulbs by 1 January 2009; rather, he adopts a holistic overview of his ministerial responsibilities. He talks about the retro-fitting of social housing — because he has a budget for social housing — and local authorities'

housing programmes and requests that they devise demonstration projects.

Although it is not rocket science, it is critical to success that the Minister be responsible for both areas and that there is sustained dialogue between us and the planning section. In the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, building control forms part of the planning and heritage section, and we meet other senior managers monthly; that connectivity is essential.

The Chairperson: Was that always the case?

Mr O'Grady: I understand that it was.

Ms Neary: As Paul Everall said, it is important not to confuse the two and implement building control through planning and vice versa. We constantly encounter a grey area between the two. However, being able to discuss and define that grey area is the advantage of being in the same Department. In another Department, it would be more difficult.

Dr Farry: Do the regulations in the Bill allow developers or builders to determine which renewables to employ? That may not necessarily be achieved through microgeneration but through buying into different technologies individually or collectively. Does such flexibility exist?

Ms Neary: The requirement is that 10 kilowatt hours per metre squared per annum of renewable energy sources must be used. The legislation states "a reasonable proportion" of energy must be derived from renewables, and the guidance defines that amount. There is flexibility as regards how they comply with that.

Dr Farry: Although it might be outside the remit of the Department, there is debate about the efficiency of renewables technology, and there is much uncertainty about how that efficiency will improve over time with innovation and research and development. Is the market in the Republic of Ireland self-contained or is it part of a wider European market? How does the Government of the Republic interact with its colleagues in Europe to co-ordinate the pump-priming of the market? Can you encourage large technological developments on a stand-alone basis or must you work with European colleagues to drive that forward?

Ms Neary: Ireland is a small, open economy, and therefore we import construction products from all over Europe.

I am not sure whether your question relates particularly to renewables. However, many of the products that I have seen come from Austria, Germany and the Scandinavian countries; some products are also being developed in Ireland. There is a strong import into the market.

We have funding for research in the construction industry. Chris might want to say more about that.

Mr O'Grady: We would not overestimate the fact that we are major players in the game, and many of the products come from Germany and Austria, as Sarah said. However, there are two arms. First — again at the famous energy summit — the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, who has a massive budget for Science Foundation Ireland, announced a third pillar for the orientation on the Science Foundation Ireland. It has something like €1 billion over eight to 10 years, and the third pillar would be research into the energy sector with a view to seeking the elaboration of products that will have a commercial viability.

Secondly, I met Enterprise Ireland last week in its offices in Glasnevin. It has a seven-year window of €3 million per annum and it is trying to get the construction industry to elaborate strategies with third-level sectors for competence centres. They are in 15 sectors of the Irish economy — construction being one. We had a very good meeting. The people in the construction sector are very busy, but the opportunity could not be missed. However, products, strategies or methodologies would have to have transferability and a commercial value and also be export-orientated. The will and the resources are available, but I would not claim that there were major players.

Mr Storey: Your paper referred to the additional cost of the new regulations to semi-detached dwellings, which is estimated at about €10,000. Does that figure include replacing oil- and gas-fired boilers in existing dwellings? The regulations came into force on 1 April 2008.

There has been a massive change. How have people reacted when they realised the financial implications of the regulations? Can the additional cost be offset against the benefits of insulation and the savings that can be made?

Ms Neary: Ten thousand euros covered the cost of making a typical two-storey semi-detached house compliant with the new standards. As far as I can remember, it was based on a gas boiler with 86% efficiency. That is one example that showed how the regulations will apply and how much they will cost.

The efficiency standard for replacement boilers is also 86%, which generally means that it is a condensing boiler. That was not taken into account, although we would have given an indicative estimate of the extra cost of a condensing boiler, which is marginal to replacing a boiler with one of a lower efficiency. That figure would not take into account existing situations, but the cost of moving from a traditional boiler to a condensing boiler is marginal.

In general, people have accepted the regulations well. They are aware of the issues involved and want

to move towards more efficient mechanisms. The condensing boiler has a very short payback period, and the expense is recovered in about five years.

That is an easy sell. People in existing houses do not have to meet the same 40% improvement standard; that will be done voluntarily through a grant scheme: it will not be imposed. We have not had objections to the regulations on newbuild, which have generally been accepted by the public.

Mr O'Grady: There is also a market response in the South at the moment. Houses are €30,000 to €40,000 cheaper than they were six months ago. That gives some wriggle-room for the developer to absorb the additional costs of changes that he or she must make by law but still have a product that is cheaper than it was several months ago. That is a significant factor in easing the pain of the measure; although the jury is out.

The Chairperson mentioned regulatory impact assessments and the research that the Committee has had carried out. The full text of our regulatory impact assessment is on our website, www.environ.ie. The Committee's researchers may wish to use it. The precise elements of the new regulations are in the new Part L Building Regulations – SI 854 of 2007, reflecting the fact that the Minister signed the regulations on 24 December 2007. I can supply that information in case you need the reference.

The Chairperson: Thank you. In your briefing paper on building control and regulations you point out that the 37 building-control authorities do not have the power to type-approve. Please elaborate on how new or innovative systems or materials are approved. How would a developer who operates on a cross-border basis and who has type approval for an innovation or who uses new materials or systems in the North be dealt with?

Ms Neary: We do not have a certification process, so we do not have a type-approval process. A developer must comply with the requirements of the regulations and a building control officer may request information or a demonstration to prove that. That is dealt with on a case-by-case basis around the country.

With respect to innovative products, the Irish Agrément Board is the first port of call to have innovative products accepted by the market, by local authorities and, for funding purposes, by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. We have several tax-relief schemes that are monitored by our inspectors, and they award certification. They require full certification for any innovative product or anything we are not familiar with generally through either an approval body in the European system or a European agrément body that can show equivalence. Such innovations must

be suitable for use, safe and must comply with Irish building regulations. That is generally how innovative products are assessed.

The Chairperson: What if a disagreement arose? Paul Everall spoke of a technical group that would be asked to resolve disputes on behalf of building control authorities. How are such disputes resolved in the South?

Ms Neary: They are resolved on a case-by-case basis; there is no determination process. The Department's inspectors lead the way in that respect; they are involved hands-on in particular projects.

Mr O'Grady: I will clarify that. That would not be the responsibility of the building control mechanism. Floor-area certificates, which are issued by our inspectors, enable a builder to claim stamp duty on a new dwelling. Our inspectors insist on 60 years' durability, which the industry claims is excessive. However, yesterday we discussed with the Irish Agrément Board and the National Standards Authority of Ireland how we can reconcile that level of durability with new solar panels from Taiwan, China and Germany. We need reliable information on how durable they are. The jury is still out on what precise structures we can use, but the debate is ongoing.

The Chairperson: That seems to be all the questions. Thank you both for an interesting and helpful session. As always, it may be necessary for the Committee to correspond with you as we proceed with our work, and if that is the case I hope that you be able to elaborate further. On behalf of the Committee, I express our appreciation for your taking the trouble to visit us today.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

1 May 2008

CHARITIES BILL (NIA 9/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Gregory Campbell (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Craig
Ms Anna Lo
Mrs Claire McGill
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Alban Maginness

The Chairperson (Mr Campbell): As a result of the introduction of the Companies Act 2006 across the UK, a number of technical amendments are required for the Charities Bill in order to dovetail both charity and company law.

Members have a copy of the paper supplied by the Department that also lists proposed amendments, which correct minor, typographical or drafting errors in the Bill. All the proposed amendments are of a technical nature, and do not impact on policy.

The Committee Clerk: The amendments are based on amendments to the Charities Act 1993 contained in the Companies Act 2006.

During some evidence sessions, a number of concerns were raised, for example, about small companies being treated differently to small charities. The technical amendments will address such issues.

The Chairperson: The proposed amendments will affect the following clauses 27, 32, 45, 46, 57, 66, 67, 69, 70, 92, 93, 99, 100, 102, 103, 107, 108, 114, 146, and 180, and schedules 6, 8 and 9.

Question, That the Committee is content with the proposed list of departmental technical amendments, as outlined in the departmental briefing paper, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 104 (Annual audit or examination of accounts of charitable companies)

The Chairperson: The Minister has also given notice that clause 104, which refers to the annual audit or examination of accounts of charitable companies, is to be dropped from the Bill. The clause is now unnecessary given the amendments to the Charities Act 1993. It would be a duplicate, because provisions for audit or examination are contained in the Companies Act 2006.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and negatived.*

Clause 104 disagreed to.

Given the stage we are now at, do members agree that it would be appropriate to write to the Minister asking her to thank the officials for the comprehensive assistance that they provided during the Committee Stage of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend our thanks to the Committee staff for their hard and intensive work throughout the process.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

7 May 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)

Mr Roy Beggs

Mr Simon Hamilton

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Declan O'Loan

Mr Peter Weir

Ms Dawn Purvis

Witnesses:

Professor Sue Christie } Northern Ireland
Environment Link

Mr Robert Colvin } Craigavon Borough
Council

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): I welcome Sue Christie, the director of Northern Ireland Environment Link and Robert Colvin from building control in Craigavon Borough Council.

Professor Sue Christie (Northern Ireland Environment Link): Thank you for inviting us, Chairman. I am afraid that because of a sore throat I sound quite bad this morning, but I will attempt to say as much as I can. I will ask my colleague, who does not squeak, to make most of the comments. Northern Ireland Environment Link is the forum and networking body for environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It represents 50 NGOs and they, in turn, represent approximately 100,000 citizens in Northern Ireland.

Building regulations have an important role to play in combating climate change and promoting financial growth in Northern Ireland. Energy use in buildings — whether in homes, offices or industry — accounts for 81% of the non-transport energy consumption in the

Province. Therefore building regulations will control a highly significant proportion of the total use.

As promoted throughout the Assembly, action must be taken to achieve a 3% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions per annum. That target forms part of the UK's climate change Bill, which will be introduced into Northern Ireland later in the year. Data show that to reach the 80% reduction deemed necessary to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, a 3% year-on-year reduction must be achieved. Northern Ireland has a duty to play its part and should therefore set its own specific targets. Rather than being at odds with the economic development of the Province, such a reduction will provide a major stimulus to it, and it will be one step towards Northern Ireland's becoming a leading low-carbon economy.

Building regulations have a major role to play, and although recent changes were positive, they did not go far enough. Even over the past year or so — and certainly since the regulations were developed — there have been significant changes in the price of oil and the security of supply. There is now, therefore, increased urgency to act on CO₂ emissions. Insulation and the reduction of waste are fundamental to making Northern Ireland a lower-carbon economy.

As the cost of energy increases, it will become even more crucial to invest in the early-stage development of technologies to reduce energy use in order to prevent people incurring high costs in the longer term that they will be unable to afford. Given the high level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, that is particularly important for the housing sector.

It is inevitable that the cost of energy will continue to increase. As it does, it will become increasingly advantageous — to the economy and the environment — to incur the upfront cost of technology rather than the longer-term cost of the energy used in buildings. The financial drivers will continue to increase with the likely introduction of carbon pricing and carbon taxes. The security of supply is already an issue and, therefore, it is important to diversify the sources of energy as well as reduce the amount of energy used.

Government must lead by example so that people in all sectors will follow suit. As a major contractor, with £1.8 billion of annual expenditure, they must also be drivers for change in Northern Ireland business. Northern Ireland must demonstrate that it has the highest possible standards to provide impetus for new products and businesses.

Many opportunities for the generation of renewables exist in Northern Ireland: for example, microgeneration in buildings is estimated to cost from as little as £6,000 per dwelling. That can come from a variety of relevant sources, such as photovoltaics, wind, ground-source heat pumps or deep-heat sources.

The type of renewable energy relevant to any particular building or dwelling must be related to the site of the building, the available energies, the intended use of the building, and possible alternative sources of energy such as chicken manure. There is also the possibility of macro-generation through local sources, either through combined heat and power stations that use waste products or other renewable resources, which can then be a requirement for new housing or commercial developments. That will ensure that new developments will benefit the local economy and not be a drain on it because of their energy requirements.

Northern Ireland has many sources of renewable energy, including waste products. We need to look at the most appropriate technology for the needs of an area; we also need to include lifetime costings of carbon — including the fuels used for a building — as well as the incoming carbon pricing regimes. For any development, an environmental and social impact assessment is needed, as well as economic impact assessments, to ensure that the development is the right one for the future; not just the most economically viable development for a developer for today, but something that will benefit Northern Ireland's people for many years to come.

Thermal treatment is often used as a euphemism for the incineration of municipal waste. There is nothing particularly wrong with the various types of thermal treatment, but it should only be used where it is the best available technology with the highest energy output. It should not be used as a catch-all or as an excuse to meet our waste regulations through burning everything to generate a little bit of energy. There must be a balance so that we get the best possible outputs from all our energy.

The Committee commented on specific points that we raised, but we thought that today it would be more appropriate to discuss general issues. We welcome the new rating systems and hope that people will be able to understand them. However, there is much still to do. We would like to see more in the building regulations, for example, and requirements for recycled products and water-saving devices in new buildings. There is also a need to go beyond the consideration of new buildings only; they are significant, but most buildings are not new. We can retro-fit existing buildings without demolishing them and starting again. There should be considerable co-ordination between building regulations and planning to ensure that we end up with the best local solutions; not just the cheapest option at the moment, but the best longer-term solution.

Mr Robert Colvin (Craigavon Borough Council): I agree with Sue. Building regulations have played an important role in advancing the environmental agenda from 1977 when provisions for the conservation of fuel and power were included in them. That was a

response to the oil shortage of the mid-seventies, and it expanded the existing regulations, which dealt primarily with health and safety. Conservation of fuel and power thus became included as an aspect of building regulations, and of course the Committee will be fully aware that that is still valid, considering the attitude of the European Union towards sourcing energy from external countries. The provisions in the Bill are timely and welcome because they address recycling, sustainable development and the environment.

One of the advantages of the building regulations is that they create a level playing field for everybody. Everybody knows exactly what the rules and regulations are and they know how to price their product, so everybody starts off at the same point. Building regulations have an important role to play, but we should not forget the important role of planning.

Planning plays an important part in building regulations. A group from Sweden gave a presentation last week about the use of combined heat and power or district heating. Their argument was that when a new development of, say, 50 to 100 houses is being built, owners should be able to avail themselves of some form of combined heating and power system. That would provide homeowners with a choice and local authorities with a vehicle to recycle waste, which, I am sure you are well aware, will be a major issue in future. If people do not recycle, the European Union could impose draconian penalties on Northern Ireland. If Craigavon Borough Council does not recycle more, it could face penalties of millions of pounds.

Combined heat and power enables waste to be used, and it should be considered in conjunction with planning. I hope that members will be able to explore some of those issues in their questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you. We would like you to consider the Committee's response to the building regulations and return your comments on it to help us to complete our report for the Consideration Stage of the Bill. We would appreciate it if you could do so by the start of business on Monday, although I realise that that is a tight timetable.

Professor Christie: We received the response when we arrived here today. We saw nothing objectionable in it, but we will look at it again.

The Chairperson: I am sorry to give your throat more trouble; I am sure that Peter will be very gentle on you.

Mr Weir: First, you talked about the need for convergence to ensure that planning and building control worked together. Will that convergence be achieved when planning and control are governed by one body, namely the appropriate local council?

At local level, there can be frustration when the two do not match. You offered a strategic view that covered broader issues about the way forward, but what improvements would you like to see made to the Bill?

Mr Colvin: The Bill is timely and appropriate, as it enables the Department to generate regulations that it feels will be necessary in future, which to an extent makes it future-proof.

Combined heat and power systems are recognised sources of energy and technology. Therefore it is appropriate that the Department can take that forward through regulations by incorporating the consideration of combined heat and power systems into the planning process. That is critical if we are to address the issue of waste and to build zero-carbon homes.

At present, the building regulations address recycling, but there is no stipulation as to how much people should recycle. Guidance could be provided on the percentage that should be used. Many people already use recycled materials such as bricks and old chimney pots for aesthetic reasons when building their homes, but more could be done. We are fortunate in Northern Ireland, as we have many quarries that provide aggregate for building, and there is no reason why we could not develop those.

Northern Ireland probably has enough water to meet its needs; however, the misuse of water is an important issue. We should not wash our cars or flush our toilets with drinking water.

Water is a valuable resource that appears to be plentiful in Northern Ireland, but it should not be taken for granted. The more efficient use of water is a worldwide issue that should encourage more widespread methods of re-use in Northern Ireland, including water harvesting and the use of grey water.

Mr Weir: What is grey water?

Mr Colvin: It is the stuff that comes off the roof and runs into a water butt. Many people use it for watering gardens, but it can also be used to wash cars and for other purposes. A useful stipulation would be that grey water should be stored rather than allowed to run off into a watercourse or soakaway, which happens commonly in Northern Ireland.

Professor Christie: Grey water poses a potential flooding problem by increasing the volume of water in our sewerage system. By separating the collection systems for grey water and rainwater from the sewage flow we can create a win-win situation for water treatment and usage.

I do not know how many members of the Committee are seriously into gardening, but we have had little rainfall for several weeks now and the water level in my pond is way down. Water shortages are and will remain a problem in Northern Ireland, and

they will significantly influence the type of crops that we grow. Hosepipe bans and the rationing of drinking water will no longer be things that happen elsewhere in the world; they are and will remain a reality in Northern Ireland. The old adage that Northern Ireland has so much water that people should not have to pay for it no longer holds.

The Chairperson: Do you hear that, Robbie?

Mr Colvin: I hear that, Chairman. Sue is right: we have always assumed that we have plenty of rain in Northern Ireland, but things are changing.

On a separate point, I welcome proposals for the protection and enhancement of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development. However, should the Bill not emphasise the benefits of recycling, which will have such a critical role in future? Will the Department include a recycling element in its proposals or will that come from somewhere else? Either approach is fine.

Mr Hamilton: Why do you seek to change the terminology in clause 2 from “protected buildings” to “historic buildings”? The term “protected buildings” in the Bill is quite narrow; does your approach make it even narrower?

Professor Christie: No; based on advice from our colleagues in the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, we believe that the term “protected” widens the definition.

The problem is that “protected buildings” could refer specifically to listed buildings. We would like to broaden the scope to include all buildings in conservation areas and historic buildings that may not be listed for a specific reason but which contribute to the landscape and the historic environment.

The Chairperson: Is there not a danger that an “historic” building could be narrowly interpreted to exclude a whole range of buildings that you might otherwise wish to protect?

Mr Hamilton: That is my concern. “Historic” implies a very particular aspect of a building.

There is more to the built environment that we may wish to protect than simply buildings of a particular age; there may be buildings of recent vintage that are important and should be valued. Proposed article 3A(2)(b) to the 1979 Order states that the meaning of “protected buildings” includes “buildings situated in conservation areas”. My concern is that the term “historic buildings” may be too narrow. I think that we have similar aims, but our interpretation may be somewhat different.

Professor Christie: My empty-desk colleague might say something specific about that. I am concerned to ensure that we do not narrow the

definition just to particularly finely built buildings that have been given protection. What sort of non-historic buildings would you like to see protected?

Mr Hamilton: Perhaps terminology such as “protected” and “historic” is insufficient. There are recent buildings that one might wish to protect.

Professor Christie: Perhaps you would prefer the word “heritage”? We may require a different term.

The Chairperson: The Department of Finance and Personnel refers to protected buildings as prescribed by legislation; however, I am unsure of that definition. Perhaps you could address that point in your response. It might be a good idea for today’s Hansard report to be passed to DFP so that we can get its opinion.

Mr Hamilton: It is an interesting subject. Despite our choice of different words, I think that we share the same concerns.

The Chairperson: One would not wish to narrow the scope inadvertently.

Mr Hamilton: That is right.

The Chairperson: Was there a positive response in England to the Renewables Advisory Board’s report?

Professor Christie: Yes. Northern Ireland is heading towards legislation that might prove useful and which will run parallel to English legislation that requires microgeneration in new buildings. Although there may be concerns about that in relation to CHP, and macro-scale requirements might be preferable to individual micro-scale requirements, the requirement for some sort of renewable energy in every new development seems to be a good way forward.

We must ensure first that we use and waste as little carbon as possible. Renewable energy generation is good for three reasons: it diversifies energy supply; it decreases the demand for CO₂ production; and it is a public-relations exercise — people can see that the technology works and they are therefore keen to have it. In Northern Ireland, people still believe that photovoltaics do not work because we do not have much sun — which is not true — and that wind turbines are still not good enough for microgeneration on buildings — which is true.

A requirement for renewable energy generation on all new buildings would be a big driver for indigenous industry — which is always good — to continue installing such systems, as the number of installations may decrease as we approach the end of EREF money.

Although the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill is different from the legislation in England for including such a stipulation, building regulations could ensure that a proportion of materials used is recyclable and that some proportion of energy requirements is met from renewable sources.

Mr Colvin: Members are perhaps aware of a report that was recently produced by the Confederation of British Industry entitled ‘Climate Change: Everyone’s Business’. I became aware of that report because I was invited to an interesting sustainable development masterclass that the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) recently ran in the Culloden Hotel. If members are already aware of the report, please forgive me for repeating what you already know.

The report said that most taxes and regulations that were designed for the old economy must undergo a fundamental redesign, including fiscal policy and building regulations, in light of the new information. With the right focus, research and development, the report suggests that we — and when it says “we”, it means the UK, although Northern Ireland has a great deal of expertise in that area — can be at the forefront of new, low-carbon technologies that could power the world economy.

I am aware that the economy is at the centre of the Assembly’s attention, but the Assembly has also recognised the role of sustainable development, not only in addressing climate change but in creating sustainable jobs. We are all aware of what has been happening to old technology industry jobs. As Sue said, we could create many new technology jobs.

There must be a role for renewable technologies in the future. They will inevitably be required, because an oil boiler could not be used in a zero-carbon house. Although such a house would not need a great deal of heating, another method of heating would be required, most probably by some form of renewable technology.

Some people are concerned that renewable technologies are not as efficient as they should be. Some are not, but how will they develop unless they are given a stimulus? Government could support a fledgling industry that could be very good for economic development, create many jobs, and address the issues that we are discussing today.

Despite debate about some of the issues, we can all agree that conserving fuel and energy is very important in ensuring that we become less dependent on external sources of fuel. I also recognise that some of those sources that we rely on are depleting and are therefore increasingly expensive.

Research and development is tied in very closely with renewable technologies, and the report, which was compiled by hard-nosed business people, shows that there is a role for it. That was borne out by the Stern Review, which showed that economic opportunities exist to do something about those matters now rather than wait until it is too late.

Despite concerns about them, renewable technologies must be given serious consideration. The

Committee should consider giving some direction in the regulations about how renewable technologies should be used in the construction of new houses.

The Chairperson: We discussed that issue last week. The escalating cost of fossil fuels has made renewable technologies a much more sustainable future option.

In your paper you say that biomass is not necessarily the panacea. At the risk of doing more damage to your throat, Sue, could you pick up on that and give us some further thoughts?

Professor Christie: There are two issues with biologically derived fuels. The first is biomass, which is energy from plants such as willows, forest brash or other crops. That provides a huge opportunity. There is also a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland through waste products. We produce a great deal of waste, and it is a terrible shame to see it being treated as a problem by burying or burning it. Waste should be used because of the nutrients in it; there is potential in anaerobic digestion and in aerobic digestion.

The controversy arises through biofuels, which produce oil products from food or land that would otherwise be used to produce food. That is where the problem arises, locally and globally. Locally, it may be advantageous, at the moment, to produce wheat and convert it into oil for burning in cars. You can put it down to economics and say "That is life". However, on a global scale, we are facing starvation — there is no other word for it. This year, because of increased demand for rice and the change in crop production — in America, primarily — from corn and soybeans for human consumption to crops for biofuels production, we have seen a huge rise in global food prices. Big ethical questions arise about whether Americans have the right to grow crops to produce fuel for their cars, when they could grow crops that would save lives in other parts of the world. We probably do not want to get into that debate here.

There is almost certainly a market in Northern Ireland for rapeseed oil to produce biofuels. There is less controversy about biomass and secondary biofuels, which are derived from waste products such as straw instead of from wheat grain. In that way, the wheat may be harvested and used for human food, while the straw can be used to produce biofuel. There are definitely ways forward.

International arguments come down largely to economics. Large swathes of tropical countries that are under virgin rainforest or which are used for other purposes are being converted to soybeans or palm oil, which are used directly for biofuels. That diverts land from virgin rainforest and produces huge amounts of CO₂. The life-cycle balance of biofuels is nothing like as positive as it appears in simple, one-line

calculations. The destruction of carbon-reducing virgin rainforest is a huge issue.

Mr Beggs: I am interested in your comments on the planning processes for large-scale developments that use combined heat and power. Could 50 to 100 houses count as a unit to which microgeneration could be applied or is the viable unit bigger than that? The technologies are proven and are widely used elsewhere.

Mr Colvin: Sue may have a view on this. Combined heat and power is recognised in other parts of Europe as the way forward. Those who have industrial waste bring it to a plant and pay to get rid of it. Not only can a plant sell energy cheaply, but it is paid to dispose of waste.

The figure that I have presented will have to be researched by the Department to find out what would produce best value. However, I can offer an example: it is not uncommon, in places such as Craigavon, to get an application for perhaps 180 houses, each of which is to be independently heated with its own oil boiler. To look at this from a different perspective, it seems a shame that there is no facility to heat that number of houses. Not only new houses could be heated, but existing ones as well. In Sweden, pipes for combined heat and power are laid along with those for other purposes, such as gas.

Such a decision, however, will have to be taken at the highest level; that is why I bring it to the Committee.

Mr Beggs: Your submission refers to the Minister's decision not to proceed with mandatory microgeneration. Other evidence shows that increasing insulation is better for the long-term use of a building. Since a building will last 100 years or more, it is better to invest in insulation and make it more efficient from the beginning.

I accept that microgeneration is likely to become a necessity in every home in future. However, do you agree that — particularly given the standard of building regulations — increasing insulation levels is the most efficient and environmentally friendly method of reducing energy consumption?

Professor Christie: It is not a question of either/or. We must increase insulation levels; avoiding waste is a primary concern. However, increasing insulation is not an alternative to providing renewable-energy in buildings that can produce the required residual heat and power. Buildings can be perfectly insulated, and can employ passive solar technology using light tubes and windows facing in the right direction. However, people living in such buildings will want to take the odd bath or run the computer; there will always be a need for additional electricity and hot water. It is not an either/or matter; renewable-energy is an additional requirement. Insulation decreases the amount of

energy lost and the amount of energy needed for heating. However, microgeneration is required for hot water — the most obvious example — because insulation cannot provide that. Photoelectric hot-water heating is the best technology available and, in addition to insulation, it is useful. We must address all the power needs of a house.

Mr Beggs: Surely, it would be better to promote efficient forms of renewable energy, such as solar water-heating systems, rather than expensive forms such as photovoltaics. Photovoltaics do not make economic sense and their promotion could put people off renewable energies. Do you agree that it would be much better to promote sustainable, energy-efficient systems that make financial sense in order to encourage people to use renewable sources?

Professor Christie: I agree, within reason. Hot-water heating is the best system. However, to drive technology and research and development we must assess the viability of photovoltaic installations. Hot-water heaters and photovoltaics are not directly substitutable. Hot-water heaters provide only hot water, but photovoltaics create electricity that can be used to power computers and lights. As renewable energy technology becomes increasingly important and demanded throughout the world, the techniques and materials used will improve. Although some of the materials used in the generation of photovoltaics are not overly abundant, new technologies are being developed throughout the world and Northern Ireland should be at the forefront of that.

We should promote existing and proven forms of renewable energy. I would not advise anyone to get a small-scale wind turbine because — although big ones work — they are simply not proven to work. However, we must push the boundaries and create demand rather than lag behind and use other people's technology. You are probably aware that a firm in Bangor was at the forefront of developing the current generation of water heating.

Why can we not continue that in other areas?

Mr Colvin: It is important to look ahead to 2016, which the Department has defined as the time for the zero-carbon house. I do not think that that can be achieved without some form of suitable renewable technology to assist in the way that Sue has just outlined.

The Chairperson has already referred to the horrendous cost of energy. A guy who lives near me has a 7,000 sq ft house, and he complains that it costs him £25 a day in oil alone to heat it, which is a massive bill. Such expense is driving people who would not normally complain about the price of fuel to start squealing a little bit. He has voluntarily asked an environmental consultant for advice on how he can reduce his fuel bill, and he is now looking at the

solutions that Sue has suggested. The market has changed rapidly

The Chairperson: Four hundred per cent in seven years, and we are looking at targets for seven years' time — who knows what will happen? It is time that the economic factor became the determinant. There is an assumption that fossil fuels are the answer. Perhaps your man does not need such a big house.

Mr Colvin: That is true.

The Chairperson: Is it an hotel?

Mr Colvin: An architect was given a brief to design a house in a certain part of the country. His client showed him a house and said that the one he wanted must be bigger than that.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much; your presentation was most helpful. It would be useful to send the Hansard transcript to DFP for a quick response. We are approaching the deadlines by which we must respond. Professor Christie, I hope that your throat recovers in time.

Professor Christie: Thank you very much. I apologise again.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

14 May 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)
Mr Mervyn Storey (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Jennifer McCann
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Declan O’Loan
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mrs Hilda Hagan	} Department of Finance and Personnel
Mr Seamus McCrystal	
Mr Gerry McKibbin	

Mr Seamus McCrystal (Department of Finance and Personnel): We have not provided the Committee with an additional submission because we feel that this session is more of an opportunity for the Committee to question us on the evidence that it has heard. Having listened to the evidence that was presented to the Committee, and having read the written submissions, we are pleased that there was a broad acceptance of the content of the Bill — although perhaps not total unanimity. We have had a lot of engagement with stakeholders, so that is as we would have expected it to be.

In particular, we had extensive discussions with Building Control, and we were somewhat surprised to learn that a number of the matters that we had discussed and agreed with Building Control would not be included in the Bill. Those issues featured prominently in its evidence, and some of the matters that it presented had not been discussed with us at all. The Committee may wish to address those issues with us.

Microgeneration is an issue that prompted considerable discussion in both oral and written submissions, and the Committee may wish to raise that matter with us today. I want to put on record that the Department disagrees with the Sustainable Energy Association’s views on how civil servants briefed the Minister on microgeneration and the building regulations, and on the information that we provided to the Minister before he made the decision not to make mandatory a requirement on renewables.

That is all I want to say for now. If there are matters that we are unable to clarify today, we can forward written submissions to the Committee.

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): To make the discussion manageable, we will go through our analysis of the evidence page by page — and I appreciate that you have just received it. You can respond as we go through, or Members can raise issues. We have noted your comments on microgeneration, and we will deal with it separately.

Mr O’Loan: What about the issue of a clear definition of “biomass”?

Mr McCrystal: This issue arises from the Northern Ireland Environment Link paper. We propose that the Bill provide the all-encompassing powers and that any specific requirement be written into the building regulations.

Mr O’Loan: So the issue will be addressed through regulations?

Mr McCrystal: If we had to make specific recommendations to require low- or zero-carbon technologies in the building regulations, and we had to deal specifically with fuel for biomass, those matters would be dealt with in the regulations rather than through the Bill’s overarching powers.

The Chairperson: Does that indicate a commitment that there will be a definition, either in regulations or elsewhere?

Mr McCrystal: We will obviously have to look at that matter in more detail. The definition of “low or zero carbon system” in the Bill is similar to that in comparable legislation in the South of Ireland and in England and Wales. We will examine the issue. However, I am not sure that beside the word “biomass” in the Bill there should be brackets to expand or clarify what is meant by it. Clarification would be needed only if we were making specific regulations or providing guidance.

Mr Beggs: Has the Department any view on the strength of wording that should be associated with the flexibility for building control departments to ensure that a building’s character can be protected?

Mrs Hilda Hagan (Department of Finance and Personnel): At the moment it says that councils must “have regard to” protected buildings. The Office of the Legislative Counsel has advised that, where a sanction is not really available, the wording cannot be strengthened to say that councils “must” do anything. If they failed to do it, a penalty would have to be available. The Office of the Legislative Counsel has advised that it might be slightly stronger or tighter to say “take account of”. We can consider whether to put forward an amendment to the Bill that changes “have regard to” to “take account of”. “Have regard to” seems to suggest that one can also disregard it if one so wishes.

The Chairperson: So you are saying not that you will substitute the words “take account of”, but that you will consider doing so?

Mrs Hagan: Yes.

The Chairperson: Will you advise the Committee of your conclusion? We may want to reflect a view in our report.

Mrs Hagan: Yes.

Mr F McCann: Many historic buildings have been demolished without regard or fear of punishment. The Bill must reflect that. It would be interesting to find out how many people have ever been prosecuted for simply going ahead and demolishing a building.

Mr Gerry McKibbin (Department of Finance and Personnel): Demolition of listed buildings is an offence under planning legislation, not building regulations, and is, therefore, a matter for the Department of the Environment.

Mr McCrystal: Building regulations would apply to the destruction of a feature inside a building, rather than an entire building. Technical booklet F supports part F of the regulations, which deals with conservation of fuel and power. There are a couple of paragraphs in there which indicate that special consideration applies when buildings in which work is to be carried out have historic or architectural value. We refer to a document produced by Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), ‘Historic Buildings and Energy Efficiency’, which is a guide to part F. I have a copy, which I will leave with the Committee Clerk. It was prepared by Environment and Heritage Service in conjunction with Building Control. It gives guidance to building control officers on matters that they should consider when work is carried out on historic buildings. Obviously, that could also apply to buildings in areas of special interest.

The Chairperson: The Committee has received some evidence. Without anticipating our discussion or our report, I believe that the Committee has an interest in that issue. Perhaps the amended wording would go some way towards addressing our concern.

Mr Storey: The definition of “protected buildings” is given as: “(a) listed buildings within the meaning of the Planning Order (Northern Ireland) 1991; and

(b) buildings situated in conservation areas within the meaning of that Order.”

The Association of Building Engineers suggested that a third meaning should be added:

“buildings of local architectural or historical interest”.

Mrs Hagan: Such buildings are already included in the guidance that EHS works to when determining whether to list a building. A listed building could already be a building that has local architectural or historical interest. I believe that we have brought details of all of the listed buildings in County Antrim.

The Chairperson: Is that because I am the elected representative for South Antrim? *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCrystal: There are 18 pages of listed buildings in County Antrim alone. We brought that along as an example. That indicates the broad range of buildings that EHS considers. I will leave that with the Committee.

The Chairperson: My constituency office is on there. *[Laughter.]*

Mr O’Loan: I know that, sometimes, our discussion goes a bit beyond the direct scope of the legislation — and I will do so here. If anyone thinks that the listed-building system gives full and adequate protection to our built heritage, they need to think again.

The Chairperson: They should take a look at the experience of tree preservation orders.

Mr O’Loan: There is a major issue here. We need to protect our heritage.

Mr Beggs: One of the suggestions that have been made to us is that the Building Regulations Advisory Committee should have a wider remit for raising issues of concern in the building industry. How are issues outside of building control raised formally with the Department? Is it down to individuals to approach the Department with an issue, or is there a structured way of dealing with the industry’s concerns?

Mr McCrystal: Because building regulations are written by central Government and enforced by building control officers at the district council level, most issues related to building regulations are raised with building control officers. We meet on a quarterly basis with senior building control representatives. Any issues that have come to their attention are discussed and considered at those meetings.

Mrs Hagan: In our paper of 8 May, we dealt with that issue. There already is a formal interface between the construction industry and the Department, namely

the Construction Industry Forum. I am not sure that that is mentioned in your analysis.

Mr O'Loan: It is.

Mrs Hagan: That is the forum that is used. Informally, building control officers can bring issues to us which we then raise with the Building Regulations Advisory Committee. Therefore, it works both ways.

Mr McCrystal: To give an example, we will meet building control officers on Friday afternoon to discuss specific issues in relation to enforcement of regulations on central-heating boilers. There are ad hoc meetings at which we deal with such matters. We have met the Council for Registered Gas Installers and the Oil Firing Technical Association.

Dr Farry: Is the code for sustainable homes going to be scheduled for one of the guidance documents?

Mr McCrystal: No. In England and Wales the Department for Communities and Local Government produced the code, and that specifies six levels or grades. The minimum level is deliberately set above the building regulations. The code states that building regulations are the minimum acceptable legal standard, and code level 1 is set above that.

When the code was produced, it was to indicate the future direction of building control: for example, code level 3 will be the next level that part F — conservation of fuel and power — moves to. That has already been signalled for 2010. As the building regulations requirements become more stringent, the code standards will also change, and they will continue to rise so that they will always be above the requirements of building regulations.

Dr Farry: Those represent ground zero, then.

Mr McCrystal: Yes.

Mr Beggs: If it is not appropriate to introduce the code for sustainable homes under building control legislation, which part of Government should give the signal as to what direction we should take? Is it the responsibility of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to look after sustainable development? Ultimately, there is a need to adopt a long-term strategy.

Mr McCrystal: In Northern Ireland, policy for housing rests with the Department for Social Development. Minister Ritchie has already signalled that the code for sustainable homes will be adopted for all public-sector housing in Northern Ireland. That will probably move on to the situation that is now proposed for England and Wales, where all new homes will be assessed against the code. If an application is not made for assessment, it is given a zero-rating against the code.

Mr Hamilton: In various evidence sessions there has been much discussion of type approval. One of the

elements that emerged was the lack of a more formal, statutory basis on which to ensure consistency in assessment. Is there a way in which a statutory mechanism could be written into the Bill, or the Bill extended, to allow a consistent approach to type approvals? There is a provision in the draft Bill giving the Department the final say to ensure consistency. Do you envisage an extension or broadening out of that? Is there a way in which that could be done?

Mr McCrystal: I do not think that we can do that in the Bill. However, article 6(g) of the Local Government (Employment of Group Building Control Staff) Order (Northern Ireland) 1994 states that group officers have responsibility “to ensure consistency of interpretation, application and enforcement of regulations”. In discussions with building control officers, our view has been that that is a matter for building control staff and the Department of the Environment.

Uniformity and consistency of approach will probably be a more significant issue for district councils. For example, if district councils are given responsibility for planning control, the mechanism will have to be consistent across a wider range of functions.

Mr Beggs: Does this issue need to be built into the review of public administration (RPA) process in the reform of local government?

Mr McCrystal: Yes. We have made a submission to the consultations on RPA making clear that that is our view, and it mirrors the view put forward by building control officers to RPA at the time.

Mr Beggs: It is important that this issue not be dropped or passed over, and that no individual council or officer be able to put a block on the process.

Mr McCrystal: We agree. With increasing numbers of functions being devolved to district councils, it is even more important that that approach be built in.

Mr O'Loan: How will you ensure that there is adequate protection to prevent unsolicited mail being sent to people whose contact details have been divulged because they are building?

Mr McCrystal: We will have to deal with that issue through regulations, on which there will be consultation. England, Wales and Scotland are slightly ahead of Northern Ireland in this regard; they are wrestling with the issues of data protection and freedom of information. They will do the research and we will piggyback on their findings.

Planning permissions and building regulations approvals are already listed in newspapers. Therefore, the addresses of properties are available, if not individuals' names. There are companies that gather and collate that information, before selling it to others. That is where the unsolicited mail comes from. As

a result, if anyone applies for planning permission or building regulations approval, before that comes through the letterbox, they will get unsolicited mail.

The information on the register will be more detailed; it will include building plans and specifications, which could be a freedom of information or data protection issue. We will wrestle with that in due course. It is a proposal that we are putting in the Bill — we would like to do it, but we will consult on the detail of the register and return to the Committee with proposals.

Mr Hamilton: With regard to use of the term “occupied by the Crown” in clause 12 —

The Chairperson: Fra was to do a bit of research on that. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Hamilton: I am still not sure whether it was the word “Crown” or the word “occupied” that was causing him some difficulty. The Department has said that the term “occupied by the Crown” is self-evident, and in most cases it is clear whether a building is occupied by the Crown. However, there might be an increasing blurring of the meaning. If Northern Ireland Water, for example, occupies a building of its own, is that Crown occupation?

Mr McKibbin: The legislation that established Northern Ireland Water specified that it would not become a Crown authority.

Mr Hamilton: That is a specific example, but there may be other bodies that veer towards being privately run organisations, which would be more at arm’s length. Some legislation defines public buildings as buildings: “wholly or mainly occupied by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.”

Would such a simple definition assist in defining “Crown occupation”? I am talking off the top of my head, but, perhaps, the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 is an example.

Mr Beggs: Have you been talking to Fra about that?

Mr Hamilton: I understand the resistance to being too expansive in saying what it is, but that could be a short and snappy explanation that defines it in terms of who is in the building.

Mr McCrystal: The current wording in the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 allows for a Crown Department to express an interest in a building as soon as a developer lays before the Department a set of plans. If the Government Department says that it will occupy the building when it is completed, it becomes a Crown building from the time that that first interest is shown. We are trying to say that the building should not become a Crown building until it is occupied. That will mean that the

private developer will have to put his plans through building control.

Mr Beggs: You say that a private developer will have to go through building control — even if the Crown is going to occupy the building. Therefore, what is the distinction? Everything will have to go through building control. What is the point in talking about the two issues?

Mr McCrystal: If the Crown undertakes any work to a building, they will have to demonstrate compliance with the regulations. That may be an internal checking mechanism.

Mr Beggs: Are you saying that internal works may not require building control involvement?

Mr McCrystal: That is possible. Building control officers — under their legislation — can offer services to Government Departments, and may provide that service for them.

The Chairperson: There is an issue relating to article 13 of the principal Order, which deals with plans deposited with a district council. The building control representatives thought that a change would be beneficial. Could the necessary enabling powers be taken in the Bill, with commencement of the provision and any related subordinate legislation coming along at a later date? The issue is whether approval of plans is required before the commencement of work. The building control professionals raised that as an issue, so it must be of some substance.

Mr McCrystal: I will have to look at the Hansard report of that meeting, but I think that the representatives from building control said that only some councils thought that plans should be approved before work commenced. It was not a unanimous decision among councils.

At present, work can commence and notification can be given to the building control department. There is a question about whether approval should be given or whether developers should be allowed to work at risk. If they do work at risk and they get something wrong, they will have to change it at their own cost.

Mr F McCann: If my memory serves me, there was a division between big town and city councils and rural councils. The people from Belfast City Council said that it would be desirable, and it would allow them to avoid any backlogs.

Mr McCrystal: Do you mean to simply allow the status quo to continue?

Mr F McCann: Yes.

Mr McCrystal: There is no unanimous agreement among building control officers about that issue. The concern that was expressed was about developers being able to start work, and that errors could be made

that would then have to be rectified, which would be at a cost to the developer. The other side of the argument is about backlogs. There could be a situation in which building regulations could face the same problems and criticisms as the planning regulations.

Mr F McCann: Problems have been caused because backlogs exist and it is difficult to move the process on. For example, city councils receive thousands of applications, and that can cause problems. Those applications cannot simply be written off.

Mr McCrystal: The large councils do not appear to have a problem with the current system.

Mr O'Loan: We should not be pushing for change in that area.

Mr McCrystal: Another issue that was raised was whether applications should be deemed approved if the building control department fails to make a decision on them within a specified period of time. Currently, such applications are deemed to have been rejected. The applicant can then appeal to the Department.

The danger in changing the system is that, in the event of a backlog, a developer's application could be deemed approved, and a development could be built in contravention. The building control department would then have to foot the bill to rectify the situation.

Ms J McCann: My experience with planning is that boxes can simply be ticked and everything approved. I have reservations about work commencing without building control approval. A lot of apartment developments have been allowed to go ahead. Residents have the right to raise objections. Building work commencing without even the planners' approval would cause considerable concern. I see both sides of the argument, but people's interests have to be protected.

Mr McCrystal: It is important to distinguish between the functions of the Planning Service and the functions of building regulations. Planning law determines whether one gets permission to build. Building regulations are about whether the proposed building complies with structural and environmental standards. Therefore, it is not a question of building control officers not granting permission for a building; it is more about the requirements that must be met while building it.

Applications may be approved, or they may be rejected for specific issues. If a developer alters the plans, which are then approved, as far as building regulations are concerned, the development can proceed. Planning is a question of whether a developer is allowed to build or not.

The Chairperson: It is a broader issue. There are genuine concerns about the rights of residents being gazumped as builders may be able to proceed with developments.

Mr McCrystal: That is more of a planning than a regulation issue.

The Chairperson: I take that point.

On appeals to the Department, are decisions published within a specified time frame? If so, does that work in practice?

Mr McCrystal: They are not published within a specified period of time. We have an internal target of making a decision within two weeks of an appeal been received. We provide background information to building control departments on any such decisions.

In the past, we did not receive many appeals — we would have received three to five a year. In the past year, though, we received 25 appeals about access to, and use of, buildings. That is because of amendments that we made to our requirements a couple of years ago. There are now more onerous requirements, which are usually about the provision of lifts in buildings to provide vertical circulation.

The Chairperson: I appreciate that some appeals are more complicated than others, but what is your general experience? Do you meet your internal benchmarks? Is there a benefit in setting specific and public benchmarks?

Mr McCrystal: The benchmarks are built into our business plans; it is a question of whether we also incorporate them in legislation. If so, we would also have to include a provision whereby, when an appeal is made, we would write to the building control department and the appellant to request that they submit any further evidence that they wished to be considered. We would have to set a period of time for them to do that and, subsequently, a period within which we would have to respond. I am not sure that that is a matter for primary legislation.

The Chairperson: No; I am not sure either, but neither am I convinced that it should be a matter of custom and practice. How is the process managed?

Mrs Hagan: Senior management monitors our business plans quarterly, and we are taken to task for any specific targets that are not met. Therefore, without being a legal requirement, monitoring is a fairly effective way of ensuring that we meet those targets. We have to explain any failure to our senior management.

All the material relating to a decision is published on our website, so that others who are in a similar situation can learn from how the Department dealt with a previous appeal. They will know whether their appeal is likely to succeed, the grounds used for appeals in the past, and so forth. Therefore, a significant amount of information on appeals is already being published. That is the custom and practice, and we see no need to go any further.

The Chairperson: Does that have as much strength as a written policy requirement — even internally? Is it literally a matter of custom and practice?

Mr McCrystal: No; it is an internal target for the Department.

The Chairperson: OK; I think that that answers my question.

Mr McCrystal: When we make a decision on an appeal, as well as informing the appellant, we inform the district building control manager and the group chief building control officer who is responsible for the overall area.

The Chairperson: Article 19 of the 1979 Order concerns the deposit of plans being of no effect after a certain interval. Building control officers and the Association of Building Engineers raised some concerns about that.

Mr McCrystal: They did raise that with us. We had several discussions with building control officers. We included that issue in the original consultation on the Bill because we felt, at that stage, that it was a primary-legislation matter. However, the Office of the Legislative Counsel advised us that we can deal with the matter through building regulations. It is, therefore, a matter for subordinate legislation, and we will address it during the next change to those regulations. We do not disagree with the sentiment. It concerned us too, and that is why we proposed the amendment to primary legislation.

Mr Beggs: I feel strongly about this. During evidence sessions, we were told that assessments are still being made according to 1973 standards. Given the new considerations of disability access, energy efficiency, and so forth, that is ridiculous. What time frame do you have in mind? Why can you not deal with it now under primary legislation?

Mr McCrystal: We would have to reflect any change to primary legislation when we amend the building regulations. As soon as this process is complete, the Department will amend the regulations to take account of guidance. We will change part A of the regulations, which deals with interpretation.

Mr Beggs: What is your time frame for that?

Mr McCrystal: It should take approximately two years to put together that package. You mentioned 1973 — we were made aware of only one such example. That was the case of a house that had been passed before the building regulations were made. We checked the building by-laws and, although the decision was correct, we suggested that it was a foolish thing to do.

Mr Beggs: I do not know how building by-laws differ from building regulations.

Mr McCrystal: Building was controlled by by-laws before the building regulations came into operation in 1972. Sorry; I did not make that clear.

Mr Beggs: So it was prior to 1972?

Mr McCrystal: Yes; it was prior to 1972.

Mr Beggs: That seems to strengthen my case.

Mr McCrystal: There was only one case, and it seemed an extremely foolish thing to do. It was put to us that that person said that they were entitled to do it, and when we looked at the requirements we found that that was the case. However, I would not like to try to heat that property.

Mrs Hagan: The point that we are trying to stress is that the evidence may be based on that one example; I do not get the impression that there are dozens of examples. If one thinks of the number of applications for building control approval that are made annually, there are not dozens of examples of that having happened.

Mr Beggs: Nevertheless, with significant changes already made regarding thermal efficiency, and more planned, there is a great potential for substandard houses to be built under old regulations in the future, unless the issue is addressed.

Mrs Hagan: When the energy performance certification requirements are introduced, it will be obvious that they are substandard houses.

Mr Beggs: Perhaps the public may not be as knowledgeable as they should be. Through time they will become knowledgeable, but, at the minute, people in the early stages of buying a house do not ask about the energy efficiency of the house straight away.

Mr McCrystal: They will be aware of the energy performance certificates very shortly. The last time that amendments were made to the building regulations, when consulting on the proposals, we organised seminars with the building industry, architects and surveyors. We told them, not only that the regulations were changing, but that the energy performance certificates would be introduced in the future. Those certificates will include a benchmark, so that the thermal performance of that building is benchmarked against current building regulation standards. There will be a clear mark in those certificates.

Mr Beggs: There is also the issue of ensuring that there is good disability access to all buildings in the future. That is an issue that the energy efficiency certificate does not address.

Mr McCrystal: No, I accept that it does not.

The Chairperson: I must apologise. We have another commitment in this room which is due to commence shortly. There are a number of other questions based on the analysis paper, and we would

like to write to you, but we would need you to respond by the end of the week, if possible, as we are about to start the clause-by-clause drafting process. I thank you again for your assistance, and apologise for having to curtail our meeting.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

21 May 2008

BUILDING REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 11/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)

Mr Roy Beggs

Dr Stephen Farry

Mr Simon Hamilton

Ms Jennifer McCann

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mrs Hilda Hagan

Mr Seamus McCrystal

Mr Gerry McKibbin

} Department of Finance
and Personnel

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): I welcome Mrs Hilda Hagan, Mr Seamus McCrystal and Mr Gerry McKibbin from the Department of Finance and Personnel. Can you please make your opening remarks and then take the Committee through the responses to the Committee's questions. To help Hansard make the record of proceedings more complete, can you read the text of the question before your answer.

Mr Seamus McCrystal (Department of Finance and Personnel): We have provided responses to the questions that the Committee submitted after last week's evidence session. I draw your attention to the Department's response on publishing the outcome of appeals. Last week, we erroneously said that the summary of appeals was on the Department's website. That has not yet happened but is being addressed as a matter of urgency. A summary of the reasoning behind the appeals and how we reached our decisions is sent out to the appellant if an appeal is not upheld. The decision is also given to the district building control manager and to the group chief building control officer. John Dumigan stated that he was given that information.

I shall start with the first set of questions, which deal with evidence received by the Committee.

Question 1:

"Can the Department please address the call for a clear definition of biomass or the concern that renewable and non-renewable technologies should be clearly differentiated (page 1)?"

Any definition of biomass would be covered by the supporting guidance if we were to make regulations that would specifically require biomass. The issue is whether biomass fuels are classified as renewable or non-renewable.

Question 2:

"Could a statutory mechanism be found which would ensure consistency of approach by councils (pages 9 and 10)? (For example determination role for DFP when consensus is not reached voluntarily or power for DFP to issue directions to councils in respect of type approval)"

The evidence that we provided was supported by the response that was given to the Committee by Trevor Martin, who is the chairman of the Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee and head of building control for Belfast City Council. Our view is that implementation of the arrangements for type approval applications would be a matter for the Department of the Environment at local government level. We also referred to the duty of group chief building control officers to ensure uniformity and consistency of approach. We have done some more research, and we have discovered some legislative provision that might address that issue.

Mr Gerry McKibbin (Department of Finance and Personnel): Section 104(1) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 states: "A council may make arrangements with any other council or any public body or government department for the exercise of any functions—

(a) by the council on behalf of the other council or, as the case may be, the public body or department, or

(b) by the other council or, as the case may be, the public body or department on behalf of the council,

on such terms as may be provided for by the arrangements."

It strikes us that that is a mechanism whereby councils cannot simply have a gentleman's agreement to carry out type approvals in council areas. It may also provide us with some statutory clout. We will discuss that matter further at our next meeting with building control.

Mr Weir: It sounds as if the 1972 Act gives statutory permission. However, you seem to be talking about a statutory duty, which is different. I see that you have made reference to the forthcoming review of public administration (RPA) legislation. I know that, as part of the RPA discussions, there is an intention to have a local government modernisation Bill, which is due this autumn. Have you received any notification

from the Department of the Environment that the statutory duty could be included in the modernisation Bill or that that Department has made a commitment in relation to it?

Mr McKibbin: No, we have not. We have made representations to the Department of the Environment, as part of the RPA consultations, that there should be some form of statutory requirement on district councils to consult one another and more widely. We have not made any more representations since then.

Mr McCrystal: The Local Government (Employment of Group Building Control Staff) Order (Northern Ireland) 1994, to which we referred to last week, would presumably have to be redrafted as part of any new RPA arrangements. At the moment, those regulations clearly set out the group areas in relation to 25 councils. If the number of councils is reduced, that legislation will have to be rewritten. Again, we indicated that the expanding number of functions that would go to councils would be part of the overall effort to ensure consistency across those councils.

Mr Beggs: I wish to register an interest as Carrickfergus Borough Council's representative on the north-eastern building control committee. You read out some information regarding the ability of councils to enter into agreements with other councils. Equally, however, that enables a council not to do so. If a council does not wish to enter into such an agreement, it will not happen. There are circumstances in which that may not happen. It might come down to the individual view of a building control officer in one area who may be able to sway the views of the local councillors. Is there not a need for those agreements to be put down in black and white and be done and dusted? Why should it be left flexible?

Mrs Hilda Hagan (Department of Finance and Personnel): The legal advice that we have is that a requirement cannot be put into this Bill that says that one council must accept another council's decision. They are autonomous bodies, with the ability to make their own decisions. They cannot have the decisions of other councils foisted on them; it has to be done through some other mechanism. It would be up to the councils. I assume that district councillors could have an input into that decision-making process, that it would not just be left to a building control officer and that that would happen on a much broader range of issues than simply building control. Councils must have to agree matters across the board, on issues that are, dare I say it, slightly more significant, even, than building regulations. I would not say that we could build a mechanism into the Bill that would require one council to accept another council's decision.

Mr Beggs: However, that does not require another council's decision but a group decision of a Northern

Ireland-wide body that would carry out those type assessments. It does not set out to impose the wishes of one neighbouring council on another but to ensure that a collective group decision is accepted in every district council area.

Mr McCrystal: The Local Government (Employment of Group Building Control Staff) Order (Northern Ireland) 1994 puts the onus on the group chief building control officer to ensure consistency of interpretation of applications and enforcement of those regulations. Group chief building control officers would be the first to tell us that that legislation gives them responsibility but does not give them the authority to enforce it in the group areas. If an individual district building control manager decides to ignore the view of the group, that can happen. Apparently, those regulations were changed in 1994 and took some of the previous powers away from the group chief officers.

Mr Beggs: Will you clarify that, at present, an individual building control officer can ignore the views of the group? How do you see type approval working in the future if it is operating under similar guidance?

Mr McCrystal: An individual can ignore the views of the group; however, recently there has been much more discussion across all district councils on building control issues. If there are councils that might or would consider moving away from accepting the decision of another council, they are in the minority.

Trevor Martin stated to the Committee that, after discussions with his colleagues, he would be hopeful that a system would be in place to agree type approvals.

The Chairperson: There will always exceptions.

Mr Beggs: I would prefer to hear that the system was solid rather than hopeful.

Mrs Hagan: The evidence that the Committee heard from Paul Everall, the chief executive of Local Authority Building Control for England and Wales, indicated that a system had operated there successfully for some time without there being a legal agreement between the district councils.

Mr Beggs: In England and Wales, there is pressure from the private sector that does not exist here. There is a possibility of an individual officer holding out.

Mr McCrystal: There are powers in the existing Order that give the functions of the district council, in relation to building control, to others. Although we could write regulations to have approved inspectors operating in Northern Ireland, there is no appetite for that in building control or the National House-Building Council (NHBC). The NHBC is one of the largest approved warranty and insurance providers in England and Wales, and it has indicated that it is not interested in acting as an approved inspector in Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: Are you saying that, if difficulties arise and individual building control officers are non-co-operative, that is an option that could be pursued to encourage them?

Mr McCrystal: It could be used as a sanction.

Question 3:

“In Clause 6(2), which amends Article 17 of Principal Order, will give DFP power to type approve where a council fails to do so within prescribed period and the applicant brings an appeal. Could this provision be broadened to address the consistency issue (pages 9 and 10)?”

Any appeal that was brought to us in relation to type approval would be binding on all district councils. If the Department were to be asked to take an additional role, it may remove from the applicant the opportunity to appeal to the Department. In other words, if the Department were, or were not, to issue the type approval in the first instance, that power would come in. The Department feels that it would not want to go there.

Question 4:

“In relation to the term ‘Crown occupation’ being self evident how would this term apply to a body which is part funded by government or a public company like SIB of NI Water (page 13)?”

The 1979 Order’s definition of “Crown authority” can be found in our submission.

In practice, that means that bodies such as hospitals, schools or council buildings would not be considered Crown buildings. That definition would be used to determine the Crown status of a public company where that has not already been established by statute — for example, the legislation that created Northern Ireland Water clearly states that it does not have Crown status.

Last week, reference was made to a definition in the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000, which states that a Government building is one that is:

“wholly or mainly occupied by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.”

That definition excludes buildings occupied by staff of Departments such as HM Revenue and Customs, the Lord Chancellor’s office, the Northern Ireland Office, the Ministry of Defence — basically, the Home Civil Service.

Question 5:

“In relation to ‘Article 19 of the Principal Order – Deposit of plans to be of no effect after certain interval’ issues were raised that provision should be made for the power to declare individual buildings which have not been commenced on multiple sites to be declared null and void. What changes will the Department make to address the issue (page 16)? Also, how will commencement be defined — e.g. construction of 4 walls as is the approach in RoI?”

It was originally the intention of the Department to amend the primary legislation to address that issue and, indeed, the question about how best to address the matter formed part of public consultations on the Bill and our instructions to the Office of the Legislative

Counsel (OLC). However, on further consideration of the matter, the OLC advised that the current wording of article 19 of the principal Order would allow the matter to be addressed through subordinate legislation and that that would be the most appropriate mechanism by which to address the issue. Therefore, the Department will address the issue when it amends the subordinate regulations.

We had considered preparing a definition of “commencement”, but we were advised by solicitors that any definition might raise human rights issues. We will give that further consideration when we examine the subordinate legislation.

Mr Beggs: Is there a timescale for amending the subordinate legislation?

Mr McCrystal: It usually takes two years to amend subordinate legislation. It takes that time to make all the preparations, carry out the public consultation and notify Europe.

The Chairperson: What exactly are the implications of defining “commencement”? What are the human rights implications?

Mr McCrystal: We have not gone into that on the advice of the OLC. We were told that the matter should not be addressed in the Bill because it could be dealt with through regulations. We have not pursued that yet, but we will do when we examine the regulations.

Question 6:

“In relation to Dangerous Buildings and Places how much urgency is this being given to this issue, especially as it has not been possible to determine ownership for some of the existing legislation (pages 17 and 18)?”

The proposals in relation to dangerous buildings were not written to fill a statutory void but rather at the request of building control in order to harmonise existing provisions. The removal of the proposal from the Bill has not weakened the existing legislation in any way. Indeed, revoking the existing legislation as originally planned would have restricted district councils’ powers to address the full scope of matters covered by the existing legislation.

We emphasise that the Department has not yet determined whether dangerous buildings fall within its legislative remit. In his evidence, Paul Everall said that that aspect should not be addressed through building regulations.

The Chairperson: How and when will the issue be addressed and the legislation updated?

Mr McCrystal: There is a lot of legislation on this matter, but it is old. In the preparation of early drafts of the Bill and consultation on them, we found that no Department would claim ownership of that legislation. However, the legislation exists, and it can be used.

At present, building control and district councils use the legislation to control dangerous buildings. After detailed discussions with representatives from building control, we learned that material that we had inserted in the Bill was starting to restrict their work.

The Chairperson: Do you mean that the existing legislation was restricting its work?

Mr McCrystal: The existing legislation covers not only dangerous buildings but places. That was the starting point.

The Chairperson: The new legislation will address that. However, how will you solve the issue about which Department is responsible for the legislation?

Mr McCrystal: Building control agreed to address that, because of its close involvement with the process and its knowledge of the existing legislation. We requested that it produce a paper that would enable us to assess whether it was a matter that we could deal with in a further amendment to the Bill or whether we could redirect the matter to another Department.

The Chairperson: Will that happen within the time frame of the process?

Mr McCrystal: Obviously, that will happen outside the timescale of the Bill. In the past, the difficulty was in securing time to introduce primary legislation at Westminster. Presumably, the process of introducing amendments to Northern Ireland legislation will be much easier now that the Assembly is up and running.

The Chairperson: I suppose it is a case of “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”. The legislation is workable, but it needs to be tidied up.

Mr McCrystal: Building control recognised the danger that we could break something that was workable. The legislation needs to be updated through amendments. However, as you said, Chairman, there was a danger that we could have broken it.

Question 7:

“In relation to ‘Backland Development’ could access for ambulance and fire service not fall under the health and safety aspects of building regulations (pages 18 and 19)? Also, is DFP liaising with DoE on this?”

Backland development is addressed in Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 under Part E, which deals with fire safety. It applies where points of access form part of a site for which building regulations approval is sought. It refers to access for the Fire Brigade up to the boundary of the building. I will leave copy of that document with the Committee Clerk.

I have also submitted Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS 3), ‘Access, Movement and Parking’, which contains a reference to access for emergency services; it is a material consideration for the Planning Service when it considers applications. We have also included

an extract from a joint guidance document — from Roads Service and the Planning Service — called ‘Creating Spaces’. One of its main objectives is to ensure that the Fire Brigade and other emergency services can gain access.

The document also indicates the minimum vertical clearance of arches. In relation to fire safety, building control is responsible for restrictions on a site for which building regulations approval is sought. However, the Planning Service is responsible for restrictions outside the site. The example of backland development in Moira was cited during evidence submitted by building control. In that instance, we would consider that a matter for the Planning Service.

The Chairperson: In practice, even though there is a divided responsibility, do you think that those issues are adequately covered between the two organisations and that it is a matter that could be resolved between the Department and the Planning Service?

Mr McCrystal: I think that it could. PPS 3 was revised in February 2005, more than likely because of difficulties that arose with a particular development.

The Chairperson: Are there any blind spots that emerge in practice?

Mr McCrystal: We would hope not. There are certainly no blind spots with regard to building regulations.

Mr Beggs: There may be a need to remind district councils that issues relating to access must be assessed at the planning stage. As a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council, I have not come across an issue on which building control provided input at the planning stage. I am aware of environmental services providing input at the planning stage, but the Department may need to remind district councils of that area of responsibility.

Mr McCrystal: It is possibly an internal issue, because district councils are statutory consultees of the Planning Service.

Question 8:

“In relation to ‘Control of Demolitions’ has there been any discussion with the Health and Safety Executive etc regarding a potential role for Building Control (page 19)?”

As that lies outside the remit of building regulations, the Department has not entered into any discussions with the Health and Safety Executive about a potential role for building control in the control of demolitions. However, we have discussed the matter with representatives from building control on a number of occasions and advised them to pursue it directly with the Health and Safety Executive. It is not a question of whether there are adequate powers in place to deal with demolitions; the concern is about enforcement, which is why building control was directed to the

Health and Safety Executive. If it is already adequately covered by legislation, the Department does not feel that there is any need for it to be covered again in the Bill.

Question 9:

“In relation to ‘Existing Buildings’ could the enabling powers not be taken now and the impacts assessed if/when it is proposed to exercise the power by making regulations (page 20)?”

When alterations to existing buildings are being undertaken, some of the requirements of the building regulations are likely to be triggered; for example, Part F, which deals with conservation of fuel and power, requires cost-effective consequential improvements to be carried out to the existing building fabric when major refurbishment of certain buildings is being undertaken. It is not normal practice to introduce a new primary power unless there is a specific intention to use it at a later stage. The proposal of the Association of Building Engineers was that such a power should be built into the Bill in case it might be needed. It is our understanding that that is not normally done, and there may be some resistance from the Office of the Legislative Counsel if that is proposed.

The Chairperson: Therefore, that power will not be added to the Bill at this stage.

Mr McCrystal: It will not be added at this stage. The regulations on work to existing buildings are the same as elsewhere on these islands. Now that we have a local Assembly, if there were any proposal to change that, and it required primary powers, it would be much easier for those to be brought in. Rather than the Department introducing such a change, it is more likely that the Assembly would do so and that the Minister would give us an instruction in that regard.

Question 10:

“In relation to ‘Council Databanks’ are there any plans for Home Information Packs to be introduced in NI? Is there a case for all the information relating to a building being brought together (pages 20 and 21)?”

The introduction of home information packs would be a matter for the Department for Social Development. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel understands that there are no current proposals to introduce such a requirement in Northern Ireland. The detail and format of the register of information that we are asking district councils to keep would be established by subordinate legislation and would be subject to full consultation.

At that stage, the Department will consider any proposals that are put forward as the type of information that should be included. That prescribed register may form part of a larger database held by district councils. We accept the logic of having uniformity in the data stored across district councils. However, the retention of data outside the scope of the

building regulations register will be a matter for the councils to agree on.

District councils, because of their disparate functions, hold a lot of information. It would not be unreasonable for district councils to hold one large database, and one element of that would be the building regulations information. Access rights would be built into that, so that various officers could see only part of the data. However, with regard to the review of public administration, and so on, the creation of a common database across all councils in the same format would be beneficial. If that did not happen, we would consult on the information that we would ask district councils to keep solely in relation to building regulations matters.

The Chairperson: Therefore, you are not making a recommendation at this stage as to either the control or the dissemination of that information.

Mr McCrystal: No, we are not; we are asking for the power to ask district councils to maintain the register, and we would prescribe that power in building regulations. At that stage, we would come back with an SL1, and we would consult widely on that.

Question 11:

“In relation to ‘Sustainable Communities’ is there an argument for placing a duty on councils, in enforcing building regulations, to promote sustainable development (page 22)?”

Section 25(1) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 states:

“A public authority must, in exercising its functions, act in the way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland, except to the extent that it considers that any such action is not reasonably practicable in all the circumstances of the case”.

In addition, section 109 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 allows councils to inform their constituents by a number of means of any matter relating to their functions. At a previous Committee meeting, we submitted information about section 109.

The Chairperson: We shall now move on to the second set of questions, which deal with the microgeneration debate.

Mr McCrystal: Question 1: “Is the Code for Sustainable Homes formally applied/promoted generally in NI, as in England and Wales (page 4)?”

The Department for Social Development has responsibility for housing matters in Northern Ireland. Minister Ritchie has announced that, from April 2008, the Code for Sustainable Homes will apply to all new social housing in Northern Ireland, aiming initially at achieving level 3 of the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Code for Sustainable Homes. There has been no further adoption of the code within Northern Ireland; however, the code was intended

to be a road map for the future development of building regulations, and the proposed 2010 and 2013 amendments to the regulations will raise the standard to levels 3 and 4 respectively of the code.

In my evidence last week, I said that the standards in the Code for Sustainable Homes were deliberately set above building regulations standards, and, as the building regulations requirements rise, so the minimum requirements of the code will always rise above that.

Question 2:

“In relation to work commenced to amend Building Regulations to follow England and Wales regarding further reductions of 25% and 44% in carbon emissions by 2010 and 2013 respectively has 2016 been formally established as a target for carbon free homes in NI, as in England, Wales and RoI (page 4)?”

There has not yet been a declaration by any Minister that the 2016 target for zero-carbon homes will be adopted in Northern Ireland. As it is departmental policy to harmonise with England and Wales in the making of building regulations, it is likely that we will continue to review Part F of the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, which deals with conservation of fuel and power, to bring it to a comparable standard to that in England and Wales, as has been stated for the 2010 and 2013 standards.

It is simply that the Minister has made the declaration that we will amend our Part F regulations in 2010 and 2013. However, as the building regulations policy has been to harmonise Northern Ireland's regulations with those in England and Wales, the Minister will more than likely make a statement on that subject at some point. I do not want to pre-empt anything that the Minister might say, but the policy has been that we move in harmony with England and Wales. Indeed, in its evidence, building control said that it wanted harmony to be maintained with the other legislative bodies.

Dr Farry: Is there an assumption that a Minister would make such a declaration, because your phraseology suggests that the declaration could be made by one of a number of Ministers?

Mr McCrystal: The answer was worded in that way because of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Minister Robinson has responsibility for building regulations, and Minister Ritchie has responsibility for the code. Neither Minister has made a statement on the matter. However, the Minister of Finance and Personnel would make a declaration with regard to building regulations.

Dr Farry: You emphasise the importance of Northern Ireland moving in harmony with England and Wales with regard to developments in building regulations. In practice, although working within a different legal framework, there is a greater tendency here to work as a single market on an all-island basis

with regard to construction than there is between England and Wales. Is there not an argument to be made for harmonising building regulations, as far as is possible, with what is happening in the rest of the island?

Mr McCrystal: That does happen. There are slightly different timescales, but the standards in the South of Ireland are very similar to our own — and to those in England and Wales. I am not suggesting that the South of Ireland copies the regulations in England and Wales, but they are similar. A Minister in a local Administration might, however, want a particular emphasis on a regulation or require a higher standard. One example in Northern Ireland, although it is not related to the conservation of fuel and power, is fire safety: we have a higher standard than England and Wales for smoke alarms in homes, and that has been the case since 1994. Therefore, although we are in harmony, there are slight differences in the requirements.

Dr Farry: Is the Department ruling out opting for the mandatory renewable target that has been adopted by the Republic? Does the Department want to leave that to change through regulations over time, or is there an argument for having an overarching policy framework in the legislation as opposed to regulations — which would be a major shift in policy?

Mr McCrystal: That is the Department's view in the papers that it has submitted and in its advice to the Minister. It was also brought forward in evidence to the Committee by Paul Everall. The building regulations make clear the role of “functional requirements”. For Part F, we are concentrating on reducing carbon dioxide emissions. In the cold building approach, a building's carbon dioxide emissions are calculated by using the insulation values in the floors, walls, roof and windows, and by examining the controls in the heating system and boiler efficiency. It is a holistic approach, and we intend to tighten those targets in 2010 and 2013. That gives designers the flexibility to install microgeneration, which would be taken into account in their calculations. However, this is not the right time to introduce a mandatory requirement.

A report was produced in Scotland for Scottish Ministers, entitled ‘A Low Carbon Building Standards Strategy for Scotland’. An expert panel, appointed by Stewart Stevenson, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, was asked:

“to advise on a low carbon building standards strategy”

in order to increase energy efficiency and to reduce carbon emissions in Scotland.

The report states:

“having considered evidence from research and from recent experience, we do not consider that the industry is yet sufficiently well developed to justify mandatory requirements in building regulations for low carbon equipment or to require all buildings to

become generators of electricity ... The cost of energy generation when viewed at the level of individual buildings could be such that it will tend to discourage development."

The report goes on to discuss:

"affordable housing, where the investment could be significant and the returns are of relatively limited benefit. Some low carbon equipment in housing can make services systems substantially more complex, more difficult for occupants to understand and more expensive to maintain."

The report also states:

"several building-integrated technologies are well established. However, others are relatively immature and are not ready for mainstream use. Indeed, certain of the technologies available are failing to achieve their intended performance when integrated into buildings."

I will leave an extract of that report with the Committee.

The Chairperson: A sliding scale of targets has been set in England and Wales to work towards targets for carbon-free homes by 2016. Why is there a reluctance to take that approach here? At last week's meeting, we heard that the Republic had set a definitive target, and you responded to that point. You talked about harmonising building regulations between here and, generally speaking, England and Wales. In order to meet the 2016 targets, England and Wales is working to specific targets to reduce carbon emissions by 25% by 2010 and 44% by 2013.

Mr McCrystal: The targets that the Republic of Ireland has set will achieve the same as we are proposing to achieve for 2010 and 2013.

The Chairperson: I am unclear why we are not being definitive in setting targets so that we can raise public consciousness of what we expect the outcome to be and why we are not acting in a proactive way.

Mr McCrystal: We have set targets. We said that carbon emissions will be reduced by 25% by 2010 and up to 44% by 2013. That will give the same results as those that were given from the evidence that you received about the South of Ireland.

The Chairperson: Do you argue that that will have exactly the same effect as defining the target?

Mr McCrystal: It will have the same effect on carbon emissions, although, in the South of Ireland, it has been decided that a percentage of that will be achieved by microgeneration.

The Chairperson: What can be done if that is not achieved?

Mr McCrystal: The South of Ireland has only one building control officer for each local authority area to enforce its building regulations. That building control manager is tasked with inspecting between 12% and 15% of the buildings. There is no deposit of plans with the local authorities in the South. Up here, in contrast,

every set of plans is deposited with the council, every building is checked and the calculations are checked. That gives the certainty of more compliance with building regulations than in the South, where only between 12% and 15% of buildings are checked.

The Chairperson: I do not dispute which system is the more effective, I simply want reassurance that our system is effective and that the regulations that we will adopt will have the desired outcome.

Mr McCrystal: The 2010 and 2013 targets have been set across the United Kingdom, and they will be harmonised. The percentages that were given by the Republic of Ireland are slightly different because it has a different starting point. The UK amended its regulations last year; the South of Ireland amended its regulations a couple of years before that. The output of what will be achieved with carbon dioxide emissions will be the same.

The Chairperson: Have you considered the benefits or otherwise of publicly setting the targeted outcomes as a means of encouraging the industry and raising public consciousness?

Mr McCrystal: Yes, we have flagged up those targets to the industry.

Mrs Hagan: The Minister announced the 2010 and 2013 targets when the last amendments to the legislation were made. The only part of our jigsaw that is missing is the 2016 carbon neutral target. That has not been announced publicly, but traditionally we have always harmonised with GB. Therefore, it is likely that we will set the same target as GB, but that has not been publicly announced. Due to the divided responsibility between the Department for Social Development and the Department of Finance and Personnel here, the question is which Minister will announce which targets.

Ms J McCann: To continue that argument, when various organisations were giving evidence to the Committee, a direct rule Minister had decided to include that target in the mandatory regulations. The organisations considered that doing so would raise awareness and ensure that renewables were at the forefront of people's minds. Why, therefore, has there been a change? Surely not including the target in the building regulations will limit the long-term development of renewables.

Mrs Hagan: To be fair, there was a balance in the evidence to the Committee; some organisations strongly supported the previous Secretary of State's announcement. At that stage, prior to the Secretary of State's announcement, it remained the Department's view that it would be better to tighten the targets. However, although the Department and its officials' views have not changed, the previous Secretary of State made his announcement.

Other evidence to the Committee suggested that not everyone supports mandatory microgeneration. The Energy Saving Trust and others suggested that the same outcome —

The Chairperson: Outcomes should be the focus.

Mrs Hagan: Yes; that is our focus, and, given that the aim is to reduce carbon emissions, it is best left to developers to decide how they can reach the targeted emissions rate in the most cost-effective way, and in a way that suits them. As long as they construct a building that meets that targeted emissions rate, there should be no prescriptive requirement placed on them to do so in a particular way.

As of now, not all renewable technologies are sufficiently mature or cost-effective, and the Committee heard evidence from the Northern Ireland Environment Link and the Climate Change Coalition Northern Ireland that the average cost would be £6,000 per home. For some, that is not a lot of money, but for many others, it is — for example, for first-time buyers who are trying to get onto the property ladder only to be told that they must spend a further £6,000 on their home. The human rights, as well as the financial, implications, would have to be rigorously tested before the Assembly could make microgeneration mandatory for all.

Ms J McCann: Do you think that not including a target would limit the future use of renewables?

Mr McCrystal: No. Our point is that now is not the right time to make microgeneration mandatory. The outputs and performance must be considered. The Energy Saving Trust's evidence to the Committee suggested that the fact that the Department proposes to make an amendment in 2010 will start to make renewables more commonplace. The trust mentioned that renewables would have to be introduced into flats and apartment buildings first and, by the 2013 target, many more buildings will have to install renewable sources of energy.

As Paul Overall pointed out, flagging up future changes to the building regulations gives the industry time to adapt and ready itself to meet those requirements. Therefore, by sticking with setting performance targets, it becomes a matter of how those targets will be met. The renewables industry has the opportunity to become more efficient and improve the consistency of its products. As mentioned in the Scottish report, some technologies are extremely good at the moment, but those that are not include photovoltaic panels, which are currently a maximum of 15% efficient, whereas the Department demands that oil boilers are at least 86% efficient.

Therefore, some technologies have some way to go in their development and in reducing their costs, because £6,000 is a lot of money, and many of the technologies cannot be used day in, day out. At the

moment, a central heating boiler is fired by oil or gas and can run constantly, but many of the technologies merely supplement that main energy source.

The Chairperson: The regulations in England and Wales are focused on achieving targeted outputs; therefore, the logic is that many buildings will require microgeneration to achieve those targets.

Mr McCrystal: Many buildings will require micro-generation, so the industry must be given time to adapt.

Mr Beggs: You mentioned the proposed amendments to the regulations in 2010. Would those amendments come into effect in 2010? Would you make a firm commitment to making those amendments well in advance? Could the amendments be put into legislation in 2009, with their start date somewhere further down the line, so that the industry is given a definite signal? In the past, when changes occurred, statements were made, but there was no real legislative follow-up. It would be much better if there were a firm commitment in advance and a good lead-in period for the industry to adapt. Therefore, the amendments could take effect in 2010, but they could be put into legislation before that date.

Mr McCrystal: The amendments to the regulations in England and Wales may be made in April 2010, but our amendments will probably be made some months after that. When the previous amendment was made to the building regulations, we introduced the requirement here less than six months after it was introduced in England and Wales. That is also our aim for these amendments. There will be public consultation on any changes to the regulations in 2009, and the industry will be made aware of those changes. Consultation documents are usually tightly written, with the intention that the proposed wording will be used in the amendments to the regulations, unless we receive adverse comment.

Mr Beggs: Do you want to ride on the back of development elsewhere and then carry out the consultation exercise here? It is important to get that consultation exercise to the industry, especially the microgeneration element of it, as most apartments will have a requirement for microgeneration.

Mr McCrystal: We will consult on the performance standards in 2009 and make amendments to the regulations in 2010. There is normally a 12-week period between the regulations being made and their coming into operation. That is intended to give the industry as much time as possible to become aware of the requirements.

Mr Beggs: Can a longer period be given, especially for architects who are designing buildings? Sometimes plans are drawn up six months to a year before they actually take effect.

Mr McCrystal: The consultation exercise starts about 12 months before the regulations are actually made, so we are flagging up what we intend to do. If we were to give a longer period of time between making the regulations and their coming into operation, we would be criticised for delaying their implementation. That is why the normal time frame is 12 weeks. In the past, England and Wales gave six months' notification between making their regulations and their coming into effect.

The industry will be aware that we have consulted on the same standards, because all the construction magazines and professional bodies provide information to their members telling them what is happening in England and Wales. Therefore, the industry will know that the regulations are coming into operation.

Dr Farry: Northern Ireland is hoping to mirror the targets that were set in England and Wales, but are we starting from a different baseline?

Mr McCrystal: No, we are starting from the same baseline. England and Wales made their last amendment in April or May 2006, and we made our amendment in August 2006.

Dr Farry: Our approach to the energy efficiency of new homes is on a par with that in England and Wales. I appreciate that there are fuel efficiency problems right across Northern Ireland, and we heard reports from organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust that Northern Ireland has some of the biggest carbon footprints in the UK. A great deal of the damage is caused by buildings, but I appreciate that we are talking about new buildings here. The baseline is exactly the same as that of England and Wales.

Mr McCrystal: That is correct.

Dr Farry: There is debate about whether to aim for the targets that are set out in the report or some form of mandatory microgeneration. Is there a middle ground? Will it be possible for the requirement to contain some flexibility as to whether the option chosen can be microgeneration or a more community-based macrogeneration, for instance? Are there two poles with different options in between?

Mr McCrystal: The Planning Service concluded a consultation on draft Planning Policy Statement 18 (PPS 18), 'Renewable Energy', recently, and it is considering macrogeneration.

Dr Farry: That begs the question: how do building regulations plug into what is happening in planning? Where does one start and the other end?

Mr McCrystal: If new regulations relating to planning and renewable energy are introduced — and the Planning Service requires some method of macrogeneration to be implemented — the calculations

that are submitted to building control will show up the carbon footprint of the development.

Dr Farry: If the Department of the Environment decides to introduce new planning guidance that requires some degree of renewables — microgeneration or community-based macrogeneration — there will be an automatic follow-through to building regulations. Is that correct?

Mr McCrystal: Yes, that is correct.

Dr Farry: That brings me back to the Chairperson's question about how to raise public consciousness on the issue, because it will require a big buy-in from people. It is a mixed-up situation, but that is not your fault. The Department for Social Development has responsibility for the Code for Sustainable Homes; the Department of Finance and Personnel has responsibility for building regulations; and the Department of the Environment has responsibility for planning regulations. It is a confused picture. It will be difficult to find ways to encourage people or inform them of any changes that will be required in their behaviour. It seems as if there is no one in charge of pushing that agenda. Everyone has their own little slice of the action.

Mr McCrystal: The way in which Departments are carved up is not a matter for us, but I take your point. We have referred to England and Wales a lot. The Department for Communities and Local Government is huge, and it has responsibility for building regulations, sustainable communities, planning and the Code for Sustainable Homes. Each of those services falls under one Department. Although matters are carved up differently in Northern Ireland, other Departments will be working on a similar basis to the Department of Finance and Personnel in that it is trying to harmonise, as closely as possible, with what is happening elsewhere.

The Chairperson: Your response paper to the Committee states:

"The Department for Social Development has responsibility for housing matters",

but it has responsibility for public housing matters. Does the Department of Finance and Personnel regulate for private-sector buildings? How will the code that is being introduced by the Department for Social Development read across to whoever has responsibility for the private sector?

Mr McCrystal: I thought that the Department for Social Development had responsibility for housing policy. In her statement on the Code for Sustainable Homes, the Minister for Social Development said that the code standard would apply, in the first instance, to social housing — for which the Department for Social Development is responsible.

The Chairperson: Is there a grey area on which we might need to reflect? There is a confusing division of responsibility, and there is confusion on why the Department of Finance and Personnel is dealing with building regulations and why a single Minister is not dealing with the entire sector. So is there a grey area that needs reflection? I am not sure; I am merely asking the question.

Mr McCrystal: I do not think that there is a grey area in respect of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The Ministers in England and Wales did exactly the same as our Minister is doing. On introducing the code, they said that it would apply to all Government-funded housing — the housing corporation and social housing. The Minister for Social Development has done the same here. England and Wales have moved on, and they are now talking about the assessment of private dwellings against the code. The Minister has done the same here. England and Wales have moved towards assessing private dwellings against the code.

The Chairperson: Will we take a similar approach?

Mr McCrystal: I am not sure. That is the remit of the Minister for Social Development.

The Chairperson: The Committee might have to address the issue, because the public may assume that the code applies to all homes and that the private sector is not exempted.

Mr McCrystal: In the first instance, Minister Ritchie said that it would apply to social, publicly funded housing. That was also the first statement that was made on the issue in England and Wales. However, I am sure that the Department for Social Development is aware that England and Wales have moved towards the introduction of mandatory assessment against the code's standard.

The Chairperson: I am sorry for delaying the proceedings. I know that we are straying away from our agenda. Thank you for your patience, Seamus, and please continue.

Mr McCrystal: Question 3: "At what point in time will it become necessary for new houses in NI to include microgeneration, in addition to energy efficiency technologies, in order to meet these targets (page 4)?"

There will come a time when new houses in Northern Ireland must include microgeneration. We have talked about the impact on flats in 2010, what will happen in 2013, and, as we move to zero-carbon homes, microgeneration will become absolutely necessary.

Question 4:

"Will NI also introduce Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes in 2013 (page 5)?"

Without repeating our answers, as we move forward in 2010 and 2013, level 4 of the current Code for

Sustainable Homes will become the fuel and power conservation standard applied in Northern Ireland.

Question 5:

"Has DFP or the wider Executive made any forecasts of what will be the likely requirements from the local renewables industry (e.g. technological performance, production and installation capacity etc) in order for NI to meet the targets going forward (pages 5 and 6)?"

The Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust have carried out research into the cost-effectiveness of renewable technology. The EU has produced a renewables energy policy that requires the UK to generate 15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020, which means from all renewable sources. Buildings will probably have to produce 40% of that target.

The national action plan for achieving the target is being developed through the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. Locally, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responsible. Paul Everall previously told the Committee that, given sufficient notice, the industry will gear itself up to meet those new standards. The Department feels that the industry should be prepared to act, because the Minister has already projected what will happen in 2010 and 2013.

Question 6:

"What is the background to and logic for having Building Regulations in DFP whilst Planning is in DoE? Might a transfer of the Building Regulation function to DoE provide for better policy coordination, especially given that responsibility for delivery of both functions will soon rest with councils (page 6)?"

We defer consideration of that matter to you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.
[Laughter.] It is a very strange scenario, and the Committee will give the issue some consideration.

Mr McCrystal: The Department dealing with building regulations has moved from what was the Ministry of Finance, between 1972 and 1984, to the Department of the Environment, where it remained until the first restoration of Government in Northern Ireland. It then moved to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The change may have been linked with the sponsorship of the construction industry. Responsibility for construction-related issues — such as procurement — still rests with the Department of Finance and Personnel. Another Bill is being brought to you on those issues. That is all I can say on that matter.

The Chairperson: We appreciate that.

Mr McCrystal: Question 7: "Might there be scope for introducing an element of mandatory 'macro-generation' ahead of any target date for zero carbon homes (page 6)?"

We have already referred to the Planning Service's recently concluded consultation on PPS 18 on renewable energy. Much of that consultation dealt with the macro element of renewables.

That concludes our answers to the Committee's questions.

The Chairperson: Committee members will see the reference to protected buildings in their notes. Are members content to accept the proposed amendment to clause 2?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Seamus, thank you for your evidence and your co-operation with regard to the Hansard recording of your evidence.

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 process or changed.

[R] — denotes that the Member has declared a relevant interest

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 2 May 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Victims' Commissioners

Mr Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its definition of the word 'victim'; and to outline any advice that has, or may be, issued to the Victims' Commissioners, regarding the definition they will use in the carrying out of their duties. (AQW 3616/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): Under direct rule, a definition of victim and survivor was included in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. It was envisaged at that time that this would offer guidance to the Victims' Commissioner as to the definition of a victim. Officials within OFMDFM have advised the Commissioners designate of this legislative definition.

Single Equality Bill

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a timescale for bringing forward the Single Equality Bill. (AQW 5432/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Policy proposals on equality legislation will be considered in consultation with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive. It would not be appropriate to comment on timescales until policy decisions have been taken.

Assembly Questions

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the delays; and (ii) the costs incurred by the department, in translating answers to written Assembly questions into Irish. (AQW 5438/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since the restoration of the Executive, translated answers to Assembly Questions have not been sought and therefore no costs or delays have arisen.

Freedom of Information

Mr K Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if Freedom of Information legislation is applicable to private companies and businesses who (i) have received funding from the public purse; (ii) have received grants from government agencies; and (iii) have received no government funding. (AQW 5493/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There are clearly defined criteria for an organisation to be covered by the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Section 4 of the Act provides that the body must be established under the royal prerogative, or legislation, or by a Minister or government department, and appointments to the body must be made by the Crown, a Minister or a government department. Bodies that meet these criteria are periodically brought within the scope of the Act by orders made under section 4. If a company is wholly-owned by a public authority, then it is automatically covered by the Act.

The Act also includes provision to extend its coverage to organisations that carry out functions of a public nature, and to contractors, who provide services which are a function of a public authority. This can be done through making an order under section 5. A public consultation to seek views as to whether additional public authorities should be designated under section 5 concluded on 1 February 2008. The responses are being analysed currently and the UK Government aims to publish a report in May 2008.

Planning Appeals Commission Procedures

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, further to its answer to AQW 5330/08, to detail (i) the average timescale for deciding an appeal heard today under the various procedures; (ii) the procedures and thresholds which the Commission has for prioritising casework covering significant housing developments, investment projects

and job creating proposals; and (iii) where an appellant can access this information. (AQW 5703/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Planning Appeals Commission is a tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status it is appropriate for its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you, and we understand she has written to you in the following terms:

“(i) It is difficult to accurately predict the average time that it will take for the Commission to decide upon an appeal that is submitted today. The clearance times for an appeal received in April 2008, will depend greatly on the resources available to the PAC. Based on the present resources available to the Commission, it is anticipated that it will take approximately two and half years to determine an appeal received today.

(ii) & (iii) The Commission has procedures for prioritising casework. These procedures cover significant housing developments, investment projects and job creating proposals. The extent to which a case may be prioritised will depend on the availability of Commissioner resources. This information is available on the Publication page of the Planning Appeals Commission website – www.pacni.gov.uk.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

The Department has made significant additional financial resources available for the next three years to enable the Chief Commissioner to address the backlog of appeals cases. From 1 April 2008 the Planning Appeals Commission’s budget increased from £1.858 million in 2007-2008 to £2.368 million, a net increase of £510k. Further increases to the 2007-08 budget figure of £520k and £538k respectively will be made in the following years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. In addition the level of receipts which the PAC can retain has increased from £150k in April 2007 to £376k per annum for the next three years.

This additional funding will enable the Chief Commissioner to fund, subject to availability, a significant number of additional Commissioners to deploy against the backlog of planning appeals cases. It is anticipated that this will reduce the average timescale for deciding an appeal once the new Commissioners undertake training and become fully operational. The Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister continues to work with the Chief Commissioner on this issue. We have increased the Commissioner complement of the Planning Appeals Commission and on 28 April 2008 we will appoint two new Principal Commissioners and one new Senior Commissioner to address the increasing complexity of the workload.

In addition the Department will shortly announce a competition for up to ten new part-time Panel

Commissioners to further strengthen the capacity of the Planning Appeals Commission. A competition for 6 permanent Commissioners will be advertised later in the year which is the earliest date that the Planning Appeals Commission will have the capacity to train and manage these new appointments.

Family Information Group

Mr Durkan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the advice and assistance he is providing to the Family Information Group on future funding of the group’s advocacy and information role on behalf of families of children with disabilities. (AQW 5937/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has a policy co-ordination role and does not provide grant funding to the voluntary and community sector. We are not therefore in a position to offer financial assistance to support the work of this group.

We have indicated this in previous correspondence to the Family Information Group and have advised them of a number of organisations which may be able to provide assistance in sourcing future funding.

Gender Equality Strategy

Ms J McCann asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the targets that have been met to date in relation to the Gender Equality Strategy. (AQW 6018/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are committed to embedding gender equality across all government policies and programmes, and to this end Departments’ Gender Action Plans 2008-2011 identify targets to address identified gender inequalities. Our focus is very much on identifying and tackling existing gender inequalities, and we will bring forward for Executive endorsement, later this year, cross-departmental gender equality action plans. These will pay particular attention to tackling the causes of gender inequalities in key action areas identified in the Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016.

To a large extent the success of the Gender Equality Strategy will be judged in the light of progress demonstrated through the cross-departmental action plans, and we will review and report on performance against targets in these plans, annually. Officials are working with departments and in partnership with the Gender Advisory Panel and other representatives to develop the cross departmental Gender Equality Action Plans. The cross departmental approach is reflected in the formation of the Inter Ministerial

Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence while the successes of Departments' partnership with the voluntary and community sector are well illustrated in events like the launch of the Women's Centres Regional Partnership. The strengthening of the voice of the men's sector, and their focus on health and family concerns, has been encouraging. We intend to conduct a mid-term review of the strategy, taking account of relevant research and statistical analysis.

Partnership Body

Mr McElduff asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its progress towards the establishment of a strong social partnership body empowered to give advice to the Executive and departments on social, economic and cultural matters, as laid down in the Northern Ireland Act. (AQW 6091/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Following the restoration of devolution in May 2007, we decided to commission a fresh review to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the structure, operation and membership of the Civic Forum and make recommendations on the most appropriate mechanism and arrangements for engaging with, and obtaining the views of, civic society on social, economic and cultural matters.

Since then, much of the preparatory work for the review has been undertaken by OFMDFM officials. A senior civil servant has recently been appointed to lead the Civic Forum review team.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any land sold by its office in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6123/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We can confirm that no land has been sold by OFMDFM in the North Down Constituency since 2002.

Civic Forum

Mr Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost of the Civic Forum in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6137/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Civic Forum was established in 2000 and held its inaugural meeting on 9 October 2000. Funding of the Forum ceased on suspension on 14 October 2002. The

Forum has not been recalled. The Forum's expenditure costs from 2000 to the present are as follows:

Year	Total Expenditure £k
2000/01	Not available from accounting system
2001/02	425
2002/03	328
2003/04 – 2007/08	None

Initial expenditure, in 2000/2001, consisted mainly of the salaries of the civil servants staffing its secretariat and some setup and operational costs. These were not, at the time, recorded separately from the other costs of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and so a disaggregated figure for that year is not currently available.

Salary and accommodation costs for OFMDFM staff engaged in preparation for the review of the Civic Forum which was announced following restoration of devolution are also not separately identified.

Investment Strategy 2008–2018

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that the Executive is committed to (i) using Government procurement to play an active and effective role in the process of tackling patterns of socio-economic disadvantage, including new patterns of infrastructure development that offer equality of opportunity for all; and (ii) mainstreaming the new Guidance on Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement, recently developed by the Equality Commission and the Central Procurement Directorate. (AQW 6363/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Investment Strategy 2008–2018 agreed by the Executive and the Assembly in January 2008 contains a commitment to seek to maximise, through the procurement process, the social and employment opportunities for all our people, addressing existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and using prosperity to tackle poverty.

The guidance on integrating Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement addresses how policy makers and practitioners can integrate equality of opportunity and sustainability into public sector procurement. Implementation of the guidance will therefore support the Executive's approach in delivering its key priorities under the Programme for Government and the relevant commitments contained in the Investment Strategy. Promulgation of the guidance across the public sector was approved by the Executive on 13 March 2008.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr S Wilson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the average length of time for applications to be considered by the Planning Appeals Commission. (AQO 3194/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Planning Appeals Commission exercises its functions independently of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister but the Department is responsible for providing the resources needed for the Commission to discharge its responsibilities.

The position at 31 March 2008 in relation to the average length of time for applications as provided by the Planning Appeals Commission shows the average time taken to determine an appeal already heard within that financial year as follows:-

- an appeal by formal hearing took on average 89 weeks;
- an appeal by informal hearing took on average 85 weeks;
- an appeal by written representation with an accompanied site visit took on average 77 weeks; and
- an appeal by written representation with an unaccompanied site visit took on average 84 weeks.

The backlog of planning appeals cases is causing considerable concern and this is why we have made significant additional financial resources available for the next three years to enable the Chief Commissioner to address the backlog of appeals cases. From 1 April 2008 the Planning Appeals Commission's budget increased to £2.368 million, a net increase of £510k, and further increases will be made in the following years 2009-10 and 2010-11 when the Commission will have a budget of £2.378 million and £2.369 million respectively. In addition, the level of receipts which the Planning Appeals Commission can retain has increased from £150k in April 2007 to £376k per annum for the next three years.

The Department continues to work with the Chief Commissioner on this issue and as a result the Commissioner complement of the Planning Appeals Commission has been increased, and from today two new Principal Commissioners and one new Senior Commissioner have been appointed to address the increasing complexity of the workload.

In addition, arrangements are in hand for further competitions over the following months. The numbers appointed will of course be subject to the availability of suitable people from within a limited and specialised market.

Sectarianism

Mr Attwood asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how it proposes to eliminate sectarianism; and to outline the budget that is available for this. (AQO 3149/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We would refer the Member to our answers to earlier questions and as stated previously, we are totally committed to the cross-cutting theme of a shared and better future for all: equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations are the watchwords for all our policies and programmes across government.

The Programme for Government confirms our commitment to continue to challenge racism, sectarianism, and intolerance which mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society.

We remain fully committed to addressing the divisions within our society and to achieve measurable reductions in sectarianism, racism and intolerance. That is why we are making additional resources available over the incoming Comprehensive Spending Review period to target these very issues.

We have committed an additional £7.5m direct expenditure over the next three years – 2008/2011, with a total investment of approximately £29m on good relations and good race relations.

Website Review

Mr B McCrea asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if a review of its website, to allow better access for those with disabilities, was completed by March 2008. (AQO 3088/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are committed to meeting the World Wide Web Consortium Accessibility Initiative (WAI) AA standard. This is an internationally recognised accessibility standard.

The OFMDFM website has been designed, developed and built to meet this standard. The website was audited against these standards prior to launch in 2005 and is reviewed regularly. The corporate standards for accessibility are adhered to when publishing web content. Staff are trained in writing for the web which covers accessibility issues.

Work has been ongoing through the department's eMedia team to allow better access for those with disabilities. When publishing to the site, business areas within OFMDFM are encouraged to use web pages rather than pdfs (Portable Document Format).

Web pages are more user friendly for visitors to the site with visual impairments.

Examples of this in the past year include the Policy link and Brussels bulletins. Both previously were only available in a pdf format, which was not easily accessible.

Where pdfs must be used, specialist software is used to make them more accessible prior to publication.

Ministry of Defence Sites

Mr D Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on their discussions with the Ministry of Defence, and other relevant government bodies, on the acquisition of vacated Ministry of Defence sites. (AQO 3156/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Noting the various debates on this matter in the Assembly and elsewhere, we are fully aware of the huge importance of this issue and the very significant impact that the development of the former military sites could have, economically and socially, for local communities.

However, we first have to secure the sites, and then develop them. Members will be aware that there is no cover within the Budget for these sites.

As a result, our aim is to secure some of these sites free of charge. We can confirm that we, along with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, have both written to and held meetings with the UK Government and the Secretary of State in order to progress this issue. We are continuing to push vigorously on the gifting of a number of sites with the Prime Minister and Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Our officials also maintain regular contact with the Ministry of Defence with regard to these matters.

Members would wish to note that the Secretary of State publicly commented on this issue recently to the effect that our case for the gifting of further sites was weakened by the fact that Maze/Long Kesh had not yet been developed.

However, we believe that requiring the Executive to purchase such sites at market value is a retraction from the Joint Declaration position and will, as previously stated, continue to push for the gifting of some of the sites.

Civic Forum

Mr Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is its assessment of the cost effectiveness of the Civic Forum. (AQO 3208/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have not yet made an assessment of the cost

effectiveness of the Civic Forum during its operation. However, the arrangements for the Civic Forum, approved by the Assembly on 16 February 1999, included provision for a formal review. The suspension of the devolved institutions in October 2002 meant that the review, which had commenced in the Spring of 2002, was not completed.

Following the restoration of devolution in May 2007, the Executive decided to commission a fresh review to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the structure, operation and membership of the Forum and to make recommendations on the most appropriate mechanism and arrangements for engaging with and obtaining the views of civic society on social, economic and cultural matters. That review is now under way.

Civic Forum

Mr McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the process used to select the senior official to conduct the review of the Civic Forum. (AQO 3154/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: A member of the Senior Civil Service has now been identified through the normal internal Senior Civil Service management process as Team Leader for the review of the Civic Forum.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the new Planning Appeals Commissioners; and to detail (i) the amount of money that has been allocated; and (ii) the reasons for the delay in making this appointment. (AQO 3098/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Planning Appeals Commission exercises its functions independently of OFMDFM but the Department is responsible for providing the resources needed for the Commission to discharge its responsibilities. Appointments to the Commission are made by us.

Significant additional financial resources have been made available for the next three years to enable the Chief Commissioner to address the backlog of appeals cases. From 1 April 2008 the Planning Appeals Commission's budget increased from £1.858 million in 2007-2008 to £2.368 million, a net increase of £510k. Further increases to the 2007-08 budget figure, of £520k and £538k respectively will be made in the following years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. In addition, the level of receipts which the PAC can retain

has increased from £150k in April 2007 to £376k per annum for the next three years.

This additional funding will enable the Chief Commissioner to fund, subject to availability, a significant number of additional Commissioners to deploy against the backlog of planning appeals cases.

Officials in our department continue to work with the Chief Commissioner on this issue. The Commissioner complement of the Planning Appeals Commission has been increased and we have appointed from today two new Principal Commissioners and one new Senior Commissioner to address the increasing complexity of the workload.

In addition, arrangements are in hand for further competitions over the following months. The numbers appointed will of course be subject to the availability of suitable people from within a limited and specialised market.

Constitutional Reform Bill

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has engaged with, or has been consulted by, the Office of the Lord Chancellor and Minister of Justice on the draft Constitutional Reform Bill. (AQO 3099/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice has written to us to advise us of

the publication of the Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill and the White Paper “The Governance of Britain” and to invite our views on his proposed reforms.

Government Advertising

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the procedures for selection of media outlets, for all Northern Ireland Executive, departmental and government agency advertisements, through the advertising shared service; and (ii) the amount spent on each newspaper and news outlet in the last financial year. (AQO 3102/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
For classified advertising the selection of media outlets is currently made in accordance with individual departmental equality schemes. In most cases the Irish News, Belfast Telegraph and News Letter are selected for daily newspaper classified advertising. For the selection of weekly newspapers, consideration is given to the geographical representation required, cross community balance and value for money. Also any relevant legislation to the subject being advertised

is taken into account, for example planning notices are required to be advertised in at least one newspaper circulating in the locality to which the planning application relates. Work is also ongoing to develop a tender for classified advertising which will be in line with European procurement guidelines.

For campaign advertising, the appointed external advertising agency recommends the selection of the media outlets which will best meet the objectives of the advertising campaign. This recommendation is based on the target audience for the campaign, their media consumption habits, and analysis of each media’s ability to deliver on media efficiency, media reach and media cost effectiveness.

The Department does not hold the financial information in the format requested. Each department holds their individual budgets for advertising. Listed below in table one is the classified advertising expenditure by the eleven government departments and their agencies in 2007/08 by print media group. A breakdown by each newspaper is not available. However, table two contains the classified advertising expenditure by the eleven government departments and their agencies in 2007/08 by the following newspapers: Belfast Telegraph; Irish News; News Letter; and Daily Mirror. Campaign advertising expenditure for 2007/08 is not available.

TABLE 1

Group	Expenditure
Independent News and Media LTD	£657,999.46
Irish News Group	£400,669.03
Johnston Publishing	£770,214.92
Observer Newspaper Group	£100,002.23
North West of Ireland Print and Publishing Co Ltd	£80,809.27
Alpha Newspaper Group	£274,916.43
Belfast Media Group	£116,941.07
Spectator Newspapers	£32,850.15
Thomas Crosbie Holdings	£3,641.28
Independents	£150,946.18
Others	£282,904.56

TABLE 2

Newspaper	Expenditure
Belfast Telegraph	£652,650.77
Irish News	£385,732.71
News Letter	£426,046.72
Daily Mirror	£8,313.40

Victims' Commissioners

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm when the four Victims' Commissioners will be fully operational.
(AQO 3198/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
We are determined to see the new Victims and Survivors Commission put on a sound and durable legislative footing at the earliest opportunity and hope the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill will complete its passage through the Assembly by mid-May and obtain Royal Assent in June.

It is intended to make formal appointments when the legislation is in place and the Commissioners will then be able to engage fully with the important work that they have been tasked with. This work will include, amongst other things, promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors, reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in this area and reviewing the effectiveness of services provided for victims and survivors.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr Campbell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are in place to promote greater understanding and awareness of people from ethnic minorities that have newly arrived in Northern Ireland.
(AQO 3093/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
We are committed to promoting greater understanding and awareness between people from minority ethnic communities (both new and established) and indigenous people.

As it says in our Programme for Government "it is imperative that we all embrace the opportunity to create a shared and better future based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity". Greater understanding and awareness are key steps in achieving this.

In fulfilling this commitment we have just completed the awards process for a new one-year funding scheme for Minority Ethnic Communities. The aim of the scheme is to promote mutual understanding and good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds, thereby building greater community cohesion between people from minority ethnic communities (both new and established) and indigenous people. We have substantially increased - by 33% - the amount of money available for the fund which will mean more organisations spread across society here will now be funded to do the hard work that needs to be done.

Other departments also have a very significant role to play in this, for example the Department of Education. "Citizenship" is a new part of the revised curriculum, and is currently being phased in. Under this part of the curriculum, young people will explore issues such as cultural identity and heritage, diversity, inclusion and promoting respect for others. In doing this they will look at our indigenous cultures and other cultures, including those of minority ethnic people who live here.

In the near future we will be bringing forward a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future. This will tackle issues of sectarianism and racism and will provide a framework for promoting greater mutual understanding and awareness between people here.

In taking this programme forward we will address the divisions within our society and achieve measurable reductions in sectarianism, racism and hate crime. If we do not take this opportunity now there is a real risk that the divisions of our past will be replicated in the new communities that have come to live and work among us.

Single Equality Bill

Mr Burns asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a timetable for bringing forward legislation in relation to a Single Equality Bill.
(AQO 3150/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
Policy proposals on equality legislation will be considered in consultation with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive. It would not be appropriate to comment on timescales until policy decisions have been taken.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Satellite Monitoring Equipment

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will waive the charges in relation to the maintenance of satellite monitoring equipment, installed by her department, on registered fishing boats.
(AQW 5808/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): I am prepared to help the industry with the compliance costs associated with the operation of the Vessel Monitoring System. I will

provide funding to meet the cost of the warranty for a further 2 years and to meet also the transmission costs which each vessel owner has to pay when the vessel is tracked by the satellite monitor.

Direct Fuel Subsidies

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the reasons why fishermen are not benefiting from direct fuel subsidies that have been approved by the European Commission for fishermen in France and Spain. (AQW 5810/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I raised this issue with Commissioner Borg when I met him on 1 April. He said that he was aware of the Spanish and French aid schemes. His view was that the Spanish scheme which provides payments to their fishermen appeared to fall within the State Aid de minimis provisions. His Directorate are still assessing the aid notified by France.

I have considered carefully the option for de-minimis aid and after discussing this with my Executive colleagues I have decided that it is more appropriate to focus on a longer term strategic plan which I outlined in my statement to the Assembly on 28th April.

European Fisheries Fund

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will develop and implement a plan using the European Fisheries Fund to address the fuel crisis facing the fishing industry. (AQW 5813/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In my statement to the Assembly on 28th April I indicated that I want to ensure that the EFF funding is used in a strategic way to achieve a profitable future for the catching sector. As part of that longer term approach I want to see a focus on improving fuel efficiency in the fleet using EFF as appropriate. There is no one solution which will be the answer for all vessels in the fleet, but there is a body of technical assessment and research on possible fuel efficiency measures and barriers to their uptake. I want to see every opportunity explored to take advantage of this work.

Landing and Marketing Dues

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to suspending Landing and Marketing dues for locally owned fishing vessels from 1 April 2008 and

replacing them with an emergency grant from her department. (AQW 5815/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Having considered carefully this option I have decided that it is more appropriate to focus on a longer term strategic plan to establish a framework which enables the industry to make whatever changes are necessary to adjust to the new circumstances and to achieve long-term sustainability and prosperity.

Rivers Agency

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) what plans Rivers Agency has to protect the 28,000 homes believed to be under threat from flooding; (ii) the funding in place for these measures; (iii) any bids she will make for additional funding; and (iv) to give a timescale within which these measures will be completed. (AQW 5980/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) The figure of 28,000 properties at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea is purely a strategic planning assessment to enable the Agency to effectively manage the risk of flooding through a proactive approach. This assessment is the first stage in a process in that it will identify the areas where more detailed assessments need to be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the European Floods Directive. The final outputs of this process will be in the form of Flood Risk Management Plans which will specify site specific objectives and measures to manage the risk of flooding.

Where the Agency is currently aware of specific flooding problems investigations are carried out as a matter of course which may result in a flood alleviation works being undertaken. The objectives and measures from the Flood Risk Management Plans referred to above, when in place, will identify the need for flood management measures some of which will be in the form of flood alleviation schemes.

- (ii) The Rivers Agency has bid for and been allocated capital funding within the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) namely £7,381M in 2008-09 £5,971M in 2009-10 and £6,511M in 2011-12. This includes funding for flood alleviation schemes. It also includes funding for wider flood risk management which includes delivery of the European Floods Directive.

- (iii) Additional bids will be made to recover reduced allocations for 2009-10 and 2010-11 resulting from recent budget decisions. As the implementation of the Floods Directive is taken forward and the site specific information on flood risk and the associated management measures becomes clearer the need for additional funding will be assessed against current allocations.
- (iv) The Agency has an ongoing prioritised programme to investigate flooding from rivers and the sea to identify the scope for and procure viable flood alleviation schemes.

The timescales laid down by the Floods Directive require transposition into Northern Ireland legislation by November 2009; assessments of areas at significant risk to be completed by December 2011; flood hazard and flood risk maps to be completed by December 2013 and Flood Risk Management Plans to be completed by December 2015. Thereafter assessments, mapping and Plans to be reviewed every 6 years. The Agency is required to meet these timescales and where feasible will be seeking every opportunity for earlier delivery.

Flood Protection

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why only 77 homes will benefit from flood protection measures in the current year.
(AQW 5981/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Flood protection schemes are based on site specific investigations and are prioritised within the Agency programme taking account of available resources within the current year and completion of legal requirements on public consultation and exhibition. The figure of 77 homes is the number expected to benefit from the schemes which will be completed in 2008/2009 financial year.

The number of properties which benefit from flood alleviation measures in any year varies, this year being much lower than last when the Agency completed schemes at Newcastle and Stoneyford which provided protection to over 800 properties. The figure must also be seen in context of the Agency's overall prioritised portfolio of schemes for 2008/2009 which includes culvert refurbishment, drainage infrastructure provision as well as flood alleviation. All of these schemes contribute to flood risk management.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of visits made by departmental staff during 2007 and 2008 to

the farm on the Ballyroney Road, Katesbridge, where animals were removed as a result of alleged cruelty.
(AQW 5982/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Apart from the recent visits in April 2008, there were no additional visits during 2008. The Department visited the premises on four occasions between June and December 2007. During these visits a DARD Veterinary Officer was present, accompanied by members of the PSNI.

Official Meetings

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the discussions she has had with Ministers in the European Union in relation to (i) farming issues; and (ii) fishing issues, directly relating to the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim.
(AQW 5991/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since assuming my responsibilities as Agriculture Minister, I have been proactive in establishing a closer working relationship with the European Commission. To date, I have participated in 6 meetings with the European Commission on farming and fishing issues. Given the nature of these discussions they have to date reflected our regional interests rather than a particular parliamentary constituency.

Coastline Protection

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the progress that Rivers Agency has made in relation to protecting the coastline.
(AQW 6006/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Protecting the coastline encompasses managing the risk of both coastal flooding and erosion.

Under the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 Rivers Agency has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of sea defences designed to protect against coastal flooding. Currently the Agency has maintenance responsibility for some 26 kilometres of sea defences around the coast of NI. As part of the management of these assets major refurbishment at Strangford and Lough Foyle was undertaken in the last decade.

The assessment of coastal flood risk is taking a significant step forward with the introduction of predictive flood mapping for NI. This will enable a strategic assessment for planning purposes to enable the Agency to more effectively manage the risk of flooding. This assessment is the first stage in a process in that it will identify the areas where

more detailed assessments need to be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the European Floods Directive. The final outputs of this process will be in the form of Flood Risk Management Plans which will specify site specific objectives and measures to manage the risk of flooding.

It is intended that flood maps for all of NI will be available in late summer 2008 including allowance for climate change and predicted sea level rise.

With regard to coastal erosion NI does not have any specific legislation. Essential works within the sphere of interest of various Government Departments continue to be dealt with under an historic interdepartmental agreement known as the Bateman Formula.

Under this Formula cost beneficial works, to protect essential infrastructure, may be undertaken by the Department or Authority responsible for the asset at risk. Rivers Agency's intervention on coastal erosion is limited to those cases which do not fall within the functional areas of other Departments and where works satisfy cost-benefit appraisal criteria.

Future management of the coast is currently under review.

Staff Absence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in her department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6008/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: For the purpose of answering this question the figures provided relate to DARD staff who submitted medical evidence, which specifically stated stress as the cause of absence.

The 5 years referred to have been taken as the last 5 financial years starting in 2003/2004 and includes science service staff up to 2005/2006, before the establishment of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

The information requested is set out in detail in the attached tables with a summary below.

TOTAL DARD STAFF ABSENT DUE TO STRESS BY YEAR.

	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Non-Industrial	85	63	39	52	61
Industrial	8	7	11	8	3

Rivers Agency

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will consider extending the Rivers Agency's remit to clearing debris from rivers beyond the current position of solely removing obstructions. (AQW 6031/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have no plans to extend Rivers Agency's current drainage remit. As an Agency within DARD, the drainage authority for NI, it is currently charged with maintaining free flow/drainage function in some 6800 kilometres of designated watercourses. The Agency's maintenance programme includes the removal of debris which is causing or likely to cause a significant obstruction to flows. This also involves frequent inspection and clearance of over 800 urban grilles where blockage may cause flooding. Extension of maintenance to removal of all observed or reported debris from watercourses could divert staff from essential flood management. Moreover it would mean the Rivers Agency assuming functions on waste management, amenity and water quality enhancement which currently rest with the Department of the Environment and District Councils.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any land sold by her department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6119/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has not sold any land in the North Down constituency area in the period since 2002.

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff in her department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6142/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: For the purpose of answering the question, the figures provided relate in (i) to staff issued with formal warnings for unsatisfactory attendance or conduct related issues; and in (ii) to staff that faced formal disciplinary charges relating to misconduct. Where these charges have subsequently resulted in a formal warning, details have been included in both (i) and (ii).

- (i) 110 staff in this Department have received official warnings.
- (ii) 14 staff have faced disciplinary procedures.

Farm Nutrient Management Scheme

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, as of 30 April 2008, the number of farmers that have yet to receive approval under the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme.
(AQW 6544/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As of 30 April 2008, 770 farmers have yet to receive their Farm Nutrient Management Scheme (FNMS) approvals. In 520 of these cases information is awaited from the farmers concerned so that their approvals can be issued.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Midnight Soccer

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of midnight soccer initiatives currently funded by his department; and (ii) the other statutory bodies/agencies working with his department in supporting these services.
(AQW 5878/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland and the distribution of funding. While SNI contributed to the start up costs of the Midnight Street Soccer project at the Waterworks Sports Facility, it is not currently providing exchequer funding to any midnight soccer initiatives.

Other statutory bodies/agencies working in support of midnight street soccer include; Larne Borough Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, Lisburn City Council, Belfast City Council, Derry City Council, Craigavon Borough Council, Newtownabbey Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council, Ballymoney Borough Council, the Youth Justice Agency and the PSNI.

Trip to Texas

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the benefits of his recent trip to Texas, where culture and music were on the agenda.
(AQW 5898/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The focus of my visit to Texas was the South by Southwest music event, at which the Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission (NIMIC) in conjunction with DCAL and Belfast City Council, supported the showcasing of four bands and one solo artist from Northern Ireland. NIMIC also supported ten local music businesses to have delegates at the trade show and conference.

Initial feedback from the musicians and businesses has been very positive and it is expected that they will reap long term benefits from their participation.

Translating Correspondence

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the expenditure on translating correspondence, received by each Government department, that was written in (i) Ulster Scots; (ii) Irish; and (iii) other languages, in the 2007/2008 year.
(AQW 5959/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I refer you to my answer to AQW4494/08. Records kept by my Department do not specify the type of document translated. My Department will not be in receipt of all the data relating to departmental expenditure on translations for 2007/2008 until June 2008, following accounts for 2007/2008 being finalised. Details on this expenditure will be forwarded to you through the Assembly's Business Office once all the information has been collated.

Departmental Funding

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of funding provided to rugby, soccer and GAA clubs in each of the Belfast parliamentary constituencies.
(AQW 5967/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. Details of the exchequer funding provided to rugby, soccer and GAA clubs in each of the Belfast parliamentary constituencies over the last 5 financial years are as follows:

BELFAST EAST

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2003/04	Glentoran FC The Oval Mersey Street Belfast BT4 1EX	Safety Management	6,362.00

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2004/05	Glentoran FC The Oval Mersey Street Belfast BT4 1EX	Safety Management	7,135.00
2006/07	Glentoran FC The Oval Mersey Street Belfast BT4 1EX	Safety Management	7,065.70
2006/07	Glentoran FC The Oval Mersey Street Belfast BT4 1EX	Safety Management	4,640.25

BELFAST NORTH

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2003/04	Crusaders FC Seaview St Vincent street Shore Road Belfast BT15 3PL	Safety Management	2,360.00
2003/04	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Safety Management	5,083.00
2004/05	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Safety Management	4,385.70

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2004/05	Crusaders FC Seaview St Vincent street Shore Road Belfast BT15 3PL	Safety Management	2,250.00
2005/06	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Stadia Safety Programme	800,000.00
2006/07	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Safety Management	2,219.90

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2006/07	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Safety Management	1,802.94
2006/07	Crusaders FC Seaview St Vincent street Shore Road Belfast BT15 3PL	Safety Management	2,134.08
2007/08	Cliftonville FC Solitude Cliftonville street Belfast BT14	Safety Management	900.00

BELFAST WEST

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2006/07	Donegal Celtic FC 32a Suffolk Road Belfast BT11 9PE	Safety Management	3,150.00
2007/08	Donegal Celtic FC 32a Suffolk Road Belfast BT11 9PE	Safety Management	937.50

BELFAST SOUTH

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2003/04	Linfield FC Windsor Park Donegall Avenue Belfast BT12 6LW	Safety Management	7,121.00

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2004/05	Linfield FC Windsor Park Donegall Avenue Belfast BT12 6LW	Safety Management	7,045.00

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2006/07	Linfield FC Windsor Park Donegall Avenue Belfast BT12 6LW	Safety Management	5,900.00
2006/07	Linfield FC Windsor Park Donegall Avenue Belfast BT12 6LW	Safety Management	5,728.16
2007/08	Linfield FC Windsor Park Donegall Avenue Belfast BT12 6LW	Safety Management	4,425.00

In addition to the above, lottery funding was awarded to the following project during the same period:

BELFAST SOUTH

Year	Applicant Organisation	Project	Grant Amount (£)
2004/05	St Brigid's GAC Musgrave Park Hospital Stockman's Lane Belfast BT9	Construction of full sized gaelic pitch and two training pitches	161,770.00

Armagh Observatory

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explain the rationale for the reduction of research and development within the Armagh Observatory. (AQW 6009/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not aware that to date there has not been any reduction in the levels of research and development at Armagh Observatory.

There are issues currently under discussion regarding future funding and my Department is working with the Observatory and Planetarium in an attempt to ensure the Observatory will be able to continue operating at its current level.

Ulsters-Scots Cultural Office

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has any plans to open an Ulster-Scots cultural office in the USA. (AQW 6135/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

There are no plans at present to open an Ulster-Scots Cultural Office in the United States, but the Ulster-Scots Agency has been asked to present a paper on cultural links with the USA at the next Sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in Language format.

Ulsters-Scots Cultural Tourism

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the action he is taking to promote Ulster-Scots cultural tourism in the USA. (AQW 6136/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Chair of the Ulster-Scots Agency has been asked to present a paper on cultural links with the USA at the next Sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in Language Format. I am aware that Tourism Ireland has been involved in an extensive programme of promotional activity aimed at those of Ulster Scots heritage in the United States.

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by his department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) he is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6208/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To date I have flown business class in my capacity as Minister on 8 occasions. The total cost incurred by the Department for these flights is £15,130.21. It is standard practice for Government Ministers to travel business class.

After-School Sports Activities

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Education in an attempt to create and aid new after-school sports activities. (AQW 6235/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has consulted extensively with the Department of Education on the need to improve after-school sports activities in the context of the development of a new Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation. A draft of this Strategy, which I published for consultation in October 2007, proposed specific targets and actions to give every school child over the age of 8 in Northern Ireland the opportunity

to participate in at least 2 hours per week of extra-curricular sport and physical recreation.

Sport NI

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5940/08, to detail the remit and the independent oversight function that Sport NI will have. (AQW 6290/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is currently planned that Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) will carry out the independent oversight function in accordance with its responsibilities under the Recreation and Youth Services (NI) Order 1986. The remit of the independent oversight function will be to provide independent advice and guidance to all interested parties on sports grounds safety issues and to monitor the overall implementation of the sports grounds safety certification scheme.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff in his department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6305/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: None

Maze Stadium Site

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether his departmental accounting officer has signed off on the Maze stadium project business plan. (AQW 6326/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Accounting Officer of my Department is currently engaged with his colleagues in DFP, OFMDFM and SIB to clarify a number of issues before he reaches a definitive Accounting Officer assessment of the PwC Outline Business Plan in respect of the proposed stadium.

Maze Stadium Site

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if the current business plan for the Maze stadium being considered by the Department of Finance and Personnel encompasses a plan for the entire Maze site or for the development of a stadium complex only. (AQW 6328/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Outline Business Case which my Department

forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel, and which the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee recently debated, covers the options and issues around the development of the Multi-Sports Stadium only.

International Practical Shooting Sports

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will make representations to the International Practical Shooting Sports body to ensure that participants competing at international level from Northern Ireland can opt to represent Ireland in line with citizenship rights enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. (AQW 6340/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for representation and affiliation arrangements within the sport of International Practical Shooting is a matter, in the first instance, for the governing body of the sport, the UK Practical Shooting Association.

Awards for All Funding

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the groups in West Tyrone parliamentary constituency who have received 'Awards for All' funding over the last 12 months, and the amount received by each group. (AQW 6344/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: During the period April 2007 to April 2008, 28 projects in the constituency of West Tyrone received funding from Awards for All totalling £213,889.

These are as follows:

Applicant Name	Award value
Bishop Kelly ABC	10,000
Omagh Explorer Scout Group	8,771
Nippers Alley Playgroup	4,865
Friends Of St Caireall's	8,220
Kilskeery Parish Senior Citizens Association	9,475
Easilift Community Transport Ltd	10,000
Western Education and Library Board - Omagh Youth Centre	6,980
St Patricks Primary School	9,838
Omagh Access Forum	2,700
Rascals Community Playgroup	10,000
Camowen Partnership Ltd	6,300
Ballylaw Womens Group	4,090

Applicant Name	Award value
Dromore Amateur Boxing Club	7,500
The Senior Citizens Consortium Sperrin Lakeland	6,000
Blacksessiagh Regeneration Group	10,000
The Drummond Centre Project Limited	5,741
MACCA Youth Group	4,393
St Brigids Primary School (Cranagh)	9,375
Dromore Primary School	10,000
Sinclair Memorial Pipe Band	6,893
Bready Jubilee Primary School	10,000
Eskra Childcare Limited	7,384
Strabane District Basketball Club	1,500
Drumduff & Drumnakilly Community Association	10,000
Loreto Convent Primary School	10,000
Green Elves Playgroup	9,693
Creggan Education And Research Services Ltd	9,650
Chatterbox Playgroup	4,531

Belfast Marathon

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the reasons why in the interests of safety roads cannot be closed during the Belfast Marathon.
(AQW 6405/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Decisions relating to the closure of roads in the interests of safety during the Belfast marathon are a matter for Belfast City Council, the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service and the PSNI.

EDUCATION

Social Mobility

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail any studies from European countries that compare the degree of social mobility and whether or not the education system is selective or non-selective at the post primary level.
(AQW 4304/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Studies that comment on education and social mobility do not necessarily draw conclusions that relate explicitly to whether the education system in question is selective or non-selective. A comparative study entitled "Social Segregation in Secondary Schools: How Does

England Compare With Other Countries" (Jenkins, Micklewright, Schnepf, 2006) investigated the extent of social segregation in England's schools with that in schools across 27 countries using data from the 2000 and 2003 rounds of the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA). The north of Ireland was included in this study.

Tugann an staidéar le fios gur féidir an idirdheighilt a mhíniú den chuid is mó de bharr cúlra míchothrom sóisialta na ndaltaí sna scoileanna stáit.

The study concludes that segregation is mostly accounted for by unevenness in social background in the state school sector. Focusing on this sector, it is shown that cross-country differences in segregation are associated with the prevalence of selective choice of pupils by schools. Low segregation countries such as those in the Nordic area and Scotland have negligible selection in schools.

Research produced by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - No more Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education (2007)) argues that education systems should, 'Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection' and that 'Academic selection needs to be used with caution since it poses risks to equity.' This is based on the following evidence:

- Secondary school systems with large social differences between schools tend on average to have poorer results in mathematics and reading and a greater spread of reading outcomes. Social background is more of an obstacle to educational success than in systems where there are not large socio-economic differences between schools.
- Academic selection by school systems is associated with great social differences between schools and a stronger effect of socio-economic status on performance, but also with a stronger performance at the top end of the scale in mathematics and science.

Evidence on secondary students from PISA (OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) compared to evidence at primary level from PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and evidence from countries which have introduced comprehensive schooling suggest that early tracking is associated with reduced equity in outcomes and sometimes weakens results overall.

St Colman's College

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to confirm that children from (i) Kilcoo; (ii) Castlewellan; (iii) Dundrum; and (iv) Annaclone, will have the opportunity to travel to St Colman's

College, Newry, for their post-primary education.
(AQW 4880/08)

The Minister of Education: Leanfaidh mo mholtaí ar aistriú iar-bhunscoile de thabhairt ardtosaíochta do rogha na dtuismitheoirí.

My proposals for post-primary transfer will continue to give a high priority to parental preference. As with any oversubscribed school, places are offered at St Colman's College, Newry to those children who best meet the school's admissions criteria. This will continue to be the case in the future.

Class Sizes

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to reduce class sizes in primary schools.
(AQW 5289/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education's policy is to keep classes for the youngest children at 30 or fewer pupils. This policy was initiated in 1998 and, from September 2000, has applied to all pupils at Key Stage 1, (ie P1 to P4).

From 2003/04 onwards, Education and Library Boards have been responsible for providing to eligible schools any additional funding to meet the policy from within their overall allocations.

Téann monatóirí RO chun cinn agus lena linn sin, i 2007/8, ní raibh feidhm ag an bheartas ach le maoiniú breise do 31.5 múinteoirí breise.

DE monitors progress and this has been such that, in 2007/8, the policy required additional funding for only 31.5 extra teachers

Conlig Primary School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the projected financial cost of closing Conlig Primary School.
(AQW 5353/08)

The Minister of Education: A Development Proposal to support the South-Eastern Education and Library Board's (SEELB) intention to close Conlig Primary School was published on 29 January 2008 and the 2-month consultation period ended on 31 March.

Tá BOLOD ag ullmhú eolais faoi láthair ar na costais réamh-mheasta agus scríobhfaidh mé chuig an Aire nuair a bheas an t-eolas sin curtha ar fáil.

The SEELB are currently preparing information on the projected costs and I will write to the Member when it has been provided.

School Transport

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if she will make representation to the Southern Education and Library Board to restore the 2pm school bus in that board area.
(AQW 5431/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní mór do Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlann cúnamh iompair a chur ar fáil ag tús agus ag deireadh an lá scoile amháin. Níl an tseirbhís ag 2pm mar pháirt den cheanglas sin. Mar sin, faoi Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt atá sé a chinntiú cé acu tá sé ag dul a leithéid de sheirbhís a sholáthar nó nach bhfuil.

Education and Library Boards are required to provide transport assistance only at the start and end of the school day. The 2pm service lies outside of that requirement, so it is for the Southern Education and Library Board to determine whether or not to provide such a service.

Capital Building Programme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of funding available for the capital building programme in 2008-09.
(AQW 5523/08)

The Minister of Education: £229.6 milliún an t-iomlán maidir leis an mhaoiniú caipiteach atá ar fáil don Roinn Oideachais sa bhliain 2008/09.

The total amount of capital funding available to the Department of Education in 2008/09 is £229.6m.

Townland Names

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education to detail the action her department is taking to use townland names, where applicable, in view of the resolution passed by the first Assembly on 1 October 2001.
(AQW 5540/08)

The Minister of Education: Nuair a chuireann an Roinn comhfhreagras chuig scoileanna tríd an phost, baintear úsáid as ainmneacha bhailte fearainn a chuireann scoileanna ar fáil agus as cóid phoist. Baintear úsáid as an chur chuige chéanna i gcomhfhreagras le daoine aonair.

When sending correspondence by mail to schools my Department uses townland names provided by schools and postcodes. A similar approach is taken when corresponding with individuals.

Assembly Questions

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (a) documents; and (b) answers to written Assembly questions, partially and completely translated into the Irish language by her department since taking up her post. (AQW 5551/08)

The Minister of Education: 349 documents have been partially or completely translated into the Irish language. This figure includes some that have been translated from Irish to English. 226 written Assembly questions have also been partially or completely translated into the Irish language.

£11,438¹ an caiteachas go dtí seo ar cháipéisí ar aistríodh cuid dóibh nó iad go hiomlán go Gaeilge.

Expenditure on documents partially or completely translated into the Irish language is £11,438². This figure is from 8th May 2007 to 11th April 2008 and includes some documents that have been translated from Irish to English. Expenditure on written Assembly questions partially or completely translated into the Irish language is £1,156³.

Assembly Questions

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the amount spent on (a) documents; and (b) answers to written Assembly questions, partially and completely translated into the Irish language by her department, since taking up her post. (AQW 5553/08)

The Minister of Education: 349 documents have been partially or completely translated into the Irish language. This figure includes some that have been translated from Irish to English. 226 written Assembly questions have also been partially or completely translated into the Irish language.

£11,438⁴ an caiteachas go dtí seo ar cháipéisí ar aistríodh cuid dóibh nó iad go hiomlán go Gaeilge.

Expenditure on documents partially or completely translated into the Irish language is £11,438⁵. This figure is from 8th May 2007 to 11th April 2008 and includes some documents that have been translated from Irish to English. Expenditure on written Assembly questions partially or completely translated into the Irish language is £1,156⁶.

1 Ní seo an figiúr deiridh mar go bhfuil sonraise nár iocadh fós.

2 Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices.

3 Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices.

4 Ní seo an figiúr deiridh mar go bhfuil sonraise nár iocadh fós.

5 Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices.

6 Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices.

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail any proposal she has received for an Irish-medium school in Dungannon and to outline (i) the number of pupils who have indicated they are willing to attend; (ii) the estimated cost of the proposal; and (iii) a timescale within which she intends to make a decision on this proposal. (AQW 5581/08)

The Minister of Education: The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB), at the request of the interim school Board of Governors, has published a Development Proposal (DP) for the establishment of a new Irish-medium primary school in Dungannon, to be known as Bunscoil Uí Chléirigh. The proposed opening date of the school is 1 September 2008 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The publication of the DP initiates a statutory 2-month period during which comments including objections may be offered to my Department. The 2-month period in this case will end in mid-June and I will make a decision on the proposal as soon as possible thereafter.

Níl eolas faighte ag an Roinn go fóill a léiríonn líon na ndaltaí atá toilteanach freastal ar an scoil, nó costais mheasta a bhaineann leis an togra, cé go ndéanfar breithniú orthu sin agus an togra á scrúdú.

The department has not yet got information on numbers of pupils indicating they are willing to attend the school, or estimated costs associated with the proposal, though these will be considered in the examination of the proposal.

School Crossing Patrol Officers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of school crossing patrol officers employed by each of the Education and Library Boards. (AQW 5592/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann (na Boird) an t-eolas seo a leanas ar fáil maidir le líon na maor tráchtá scoile (SCPOs) a bhí fostaithe ar 1 Eanáir gach bliain ó 2004.

The five Education and Library Boards (the Boards) have provided the following information on the number of school crossing patrol officers (SCPOs) employed at 1 January each year since 2004.

NUMBER OF SCHOOL CROSSING PATROL OFFICERS EMPLOYED BY THE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS AT 1 JANUARY IN THE 5 YEARS COMMENCING 2004

Board	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Belfast Board	132	127	121	114	110

Board	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Western Board	234	182	146	140	139
North Eastern Board	152	152	150	149	148
South Eastern Board	149	142	166	118	111
Southern Board	220	213	208	155	152
Total	887	816	791	676	660

Irish Language

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the total number of departmental documents that have been fully or partially translated into the Irish language; and (ii) the total cost of these translations. (AQW 5625/08)

The Minister of Education: Go nuige seo aistríodh 575 cáipéis, go Gaeilge, cuid dóibh nó iad ar fad. Go dtí seo is é £12,594⁷ an costas a bhaineann leis na haistriúcháin seo.

575 documents have been translated fully or partially into the Irish language. The cost incurred to date in translating these documents is £12,594⁸. These figures are from 8th May 2007 to 11th April 2008 and include some documents that have been translated from Irish to English. . Mr Elliott will be pleased to know that my Department is currently in the process of employing an Irish language officer

Sex Education

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each Education and Library Board, the publications (i) used; and (ii) recommended for use, in (a) sex education; and (b) education about family relationships, in primary schools. (AQW 5631/08)

The Minister of Education: My Department does not hold the details of publications used in primary schools in the teaching of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, which includes Relationships and Sexuality Education. It is the responsibility of individual schools to determine which resources they will use to deliver the revised curriculum. The Department's Circular 2001/15 provides general guidance on the provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education.

Chuir an Chomhairle Churaclaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Mheasúnaithe acmhainn – Ag Maireachtáil – Ag Foghlaim – Le Chéile – ar fáil chun tacú le Forbairt Phearsanta agus Comhthuiscint a theagasc.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has provided a resource – Living - Learning - Together – to support the teaching of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education in light of the likely recommendation for the closure of Donaghadee High School by 31 August 2009, will the Minister agree to a meeting with the Parents Action Group and me to discuss the proposal as agreed by her, before any final decision is made on the future of the school. (AQW 5642/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt i mbun comhairliúcháin faoi láthair maidir le druidim féideartha na scoile sula bhfoilseofar moladh forbartha, rud a chuirfeadh tús le tréimhse chomhairliúcháin dhá mhí. Bheadh lúcháir orm bualadh leat agus le Grúpa Gníomhaíochta Tuismitheoirí leis an togra a phlé.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board is currently consulting on the potential closure of the school prior to publishing a development proposal which would initiate a two-month consultation period. I would be happy to meet with you and Parents Action Group to discuss the proposal.

Ulster Scots Drama

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps she is taking to promote and encourage Ulster Scots drama in schools. (AQW 5665/08)

The Minister of Education: The revised curriculum, which I am introducing, provides greater flexibility for schools to tailor their provision to meet the needs and interests of their pupils and the communities they serve.

Tá an drámaíocht ina cuid éigeantach den churaclam athbhreithnithe ón Bhonnchéim go dtí Eochairchéim 3 agus féadfaidh scoileanna, más mian leo, úsáid a bhaint as drámaíocht Albainis Uladh leis an chuid sin den churaclam a sheachadadh.

Drama is a compulsory part of the revised curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3 and schools may, if they wish, provide for Ulster Scots drama in delivering this part of the curriculum.

Children Statemented

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who have been statemented

⁷ Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices

⁸ Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices

for the first time, in each of the five Education and Library Boards in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5674/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLí) in iúl domh gur seo a leanas líon na bpáistí a ndearnadh ráiteas riachtanais oideachais speisialta ina leith, i ngach ceann de na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana seo caite:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that the number of children who have been statemented for the first time, in each of the five Education and Library Boards in each of the last five years is as follows:-

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB*	WELB
2003	224	330	698	476	248
2004	254	308	548	418	292
2005	287	378	442	353	304
2006	320	316	571	568	288
2007	389	311	384	532	330

- SELB data is recorded in financial years – numbers given refer to the financial years 2003/2004 – 2007/2008.

Vetting Systems

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to work with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to regulate vetting systems for those working with children and young people throughout the island of Ireland.
(AQW 5691/08)

The Minister of Education: Bainneann Cosaint Páistí le gach duine agus tá an-tábhacht ag baint leis. D'fhreastail mé ar chruinniú de chuid na Comhairle Thuaidh Theas ar na mallaibh.

Child Protection is everyone's business and collaboration and co operation are of vital importance. I recently attended a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council. The identification of measures to improve child protection, including an examination of an all-island approach, focusing on vetting and exchange of information were discussed. It was agreed that DHSSPS and the Office of the Minister for Children establish and co chair a cross border group to take this forward. My Department will continue to work closely with colleagues in DHSSPS on this and all other child protection matters.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to confirm if it is necessary that all previous independent board members express their willingness to serve again on the South Eastern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 5724/08)

The Minister of Education: On 8 April 2008 I had a very useful meeting with the Council nominees on the Board to discuss their readiness and willingness to take up their former responsibilities and to deliver those effectively.

I met with the Church representatives and General Interest members of the Board on 21 April, to advise them of the outcome of these discussions and to seek their views. Collectively, they are the majority of the membership and their participation will therefore be important if the Board is to be restored and discharge its role effectively.

I ndiaidh na díospóireachta seo beidh sé mar aidhm agam cinneadh deiridh a dhéanamh i dtaca le hathbhunú an Bhoird chomh luath agus is féidir.

Following these discussions it will be my aim to make a final decision on restoration of the Board as soon as possible.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to provide a comparison of the current financial state of the South Eastern Education and Library Board with July 2006.
(AQW 5726/08)

The Minister of Education: Since July 2006 the South Eastern Education and Library Board have continued to contain expenditure within budget whilst making repayments to both the Department and Schools in respect of outstanding deficits.

Táthar ag súil gur £13.6 mhilliún an luach a bheas ar an easnamh neamhíoctha, go dtí go bhfaighfear deimhniú i dtaca leis an staid dheiridh; caithfear fanacht go dtí go ndéanfar iniúchadh ar chuntas dheireadh na bliana 2007-08. Is laghdú £6.1 mhilliún é sin ar an staid airgeadais (easnamh) a tuairiscíodh ar 31 Márta 2006.

The value of the outstanding deficit as at March 2008 is expected to be £13.6 million, pending confirmation of final position following audit of the 2007-08 year end account. This is a reduction of £6.1 million on the reported financial position (deficit) at 31 March 2006.

Parkhall College

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to provide a timescale within which the proposed new school building for Parkhall College, Antrim, will be built. (AQW 5734/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an phleanáil le haghaidh an fhoirgnimh úire scoile do Choláiste Parkhall breá forbartha; táthar ag fanacht le costais deartha dheiridh ó Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt.

Planning of the new school building for Parkhall College is well advanced, with final design stage costs currently awaited from the North Eastern Education and Library Board. Subject to these being submitted to the Department in the near future and being satisfactory, it is estimated that construction work on the new building could start on site by the end of the year with an estimated two years to completion.

School Transport

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the amount of money that is spent by her department transporting children to grammar schools outside their own locality; and (ii) the proportion of her department's transport budget that this represents. (AQW 5735/08)

The Minister of Education: The information requested is not available in the required format and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, in 2006/07 transport assistance was provided to 26,503 voluntary grammar school pupils at a cost of £15.8 million. (Separate figures are not available for controlled grammar schools.) This equates to 24% of the total school transport budget.

Déarfainn chomh maith nach gnách cuidiú a chur ar fáil ach sa chás nach bhfuil páiste in ann áit a fháil i scoil fhóirsteanach taobh istigh den fhad siúil reachtúil 3 mhíle ó theach na dtuismitheoirí nó sa chás nach bhfuil a leithéid de scoil taobh istigh den fhad sin.

I should add that assistance is normally only provided where a child is unable to obtain a place in a suitable school within the statutory walking distance of 3 miles of the parents' home or where no such suitable school exists within that distance.

Recycling

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of waste materials that are currently recycled at (i) Rathgael House; (ii) each Education and Library Board's headquarters; (iii) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

headquarters; (iv) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools' headquarters; and (v) each Education and Library Board's Training and Resource Centres. (AQW 5741/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá céatadán an fhuíollábhair mar pháipéar, chairtchlár, phlaisteach, ghloine agus stán, a athchúrsálar sna heagraíochtaí seo, leagtha amach thíos:

The percentage of waste materials such as paper, cardboard, plastic, glass and tin, recycled in these organisations is set out below:

- (i) Rathgael House: 100%
- (ii) Education and Library Board Headquarters
 - Belfast Education and Library Board Headquarters: 4%
 - South Eastern Education and Library Board Headquarters: 8%
 - Southern Education and Library Board Headquarters: 65%
 - Western Education and Library Board Headquarters: 40%
 - North Eastern Education and Library Board Headquarters: 90-95%
- (iii) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education Headquarters: 95%
- (iv) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools' Headquarters: 35%
- (v) Education and Library Board Training and Resource Centres:
 - Belfast Education and Library Board: Ulidia - 0%
 - South Eastern Education and Library Board: No Training and Resource Centre
 - Southern Education and Library Board:
 - Newry Teachers' Centre – 40%
 - Armagh Teachers' Centre – 25%
 - Dungannon Teachers' Centre - 25%
 - Western Education and Library Board:
 - North West Teachers' Centre – 75%
 - South West Teachers' Centre – 0%
 - Omagh Teachers' Centre - 80%
 - North Eastern Education and Library Board: Antrim Board Centre – 75-85%

Renewable Energy Resources

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools that currently use renewable energy resources to generate (i) electricity; and (ii) heat, broken down by Education and Library Board area. (AQW 5743/08)

The Minister of Education: Tugann na táblaí seo a leanas sonraí, de réir cheantar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, faoi na scoileanna a bhfuil a n-acmhainn féin fuinnimh in-athnuaite acu le (i) leictreachas; agus (ii) teas a ghiniúint:

The following tables detail, by Education and Library Board area, the schools that have their own renewable energy resource to generate (i) electricity; and (ii) heat:

BOARD AREA: BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
Cavehill Primary School	Photovoltaic and wind turbine	Yes	No

In addition, 87% of schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board area are supplied with their mains electricity under an eco energy tariff (i.e. electricity from a renewable source).

BOARD AREA: WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
Cooley PS, Sixmilecross	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
St Colmcille's PS, Claudy	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
St Patrick's College, Dungiven	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Moat PS, Lisnaskea	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Castlelurg HS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Florencecourt PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Newtownstewart Model PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
St Anthony's PS, Limavady	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Broadbridge PS, Derry	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
St John's Business & Enterprise College, Dromore, Co. Tyrone	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre, Strabane	Photovoltaic	Yes	No

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
St Ronan's PS, Lisnaskea	Biomass	No	Yes
St Comhghall's HS, Lisnaskea	Biomass	No	Yes
St Eugene's College, Roslea	Biomass	No	Yes
St Aidan's HS, Derrylin	Biomass	No	Yes
Edwards PS, Castlelurg	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Holy Trinity PS, Enniskillen	Wind	Yes	No
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Geothermal Heat Pump	No	Yes

In addition, 89% of schools in the Western Education and Library Board area are supplied with their mains electricity under an eco energy tariff (i.e. electricity from a renewable source).

BOARD AREA: NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY AREA

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
Broughshane PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Moneynick PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
New Row PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Damhead PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Gracehill PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Kells and Connor PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Mallusk PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Straidavern PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Monkstown Community Sch	Solar Water Heating	No	Yes
Glengormley High School	Solar Water Heating	No	Yes
Dunseverick PS	Wind Turbine Generators	Yes	No
Glengormley High School	Wind Turbine Generators	Yes	No
Eden PS Carrickfergus	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Ampertaine PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No

School Name	Energy Source	(I) Electricity	(II) Useable Heat
St Patrick's PS, Loughguile	Wind Turbine Generators	Yes	No
Carrickfergus Model PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
St Nicholas PS, Carrickfergus	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Larne Grammar School	Solar Panel	Yes	No

In addition, 94% of schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area are supplied with their mains electricity under an eco energy tariff (i.e. electricity from a renewable source).

BOARD AREA: SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
St Columba's College, Portaferry	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Donaghadee High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Glenlola Collegiate	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Movilla High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Regent House	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Dundonald High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
St Colman's High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
St Malachy's High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Saintfield High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Parkview Special School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Lisnagarvey High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
Down High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
De La Salle High School	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
St Colmcille's	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	Thermal Solar Panels	No	Yes

School Name	Energy Source	(I) Electricity	(II) Useable Heat
St Caolan's Primary	Geothermal	No	Yes
Glenlola Collegiate	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
St Malachy's High School	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
Saintfield High School	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
St Colmcille's High School	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
Parkview Special School	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
Moir Primary School	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlissnafin	PV Panels for Electricity	Yes	No

In addition, 93% of schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area are supplied with their mains electricity under an eco energy tariff (i.e. electricity from a renewable source).

BOARD AREA: SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

School Name	Energy Source	(I) Electricity	(II) Useable Heat
Edenderry PS (Banbridge)	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Banbridge HS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Craigavon PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Drumadonnell PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Annalong PS	Photovoltaic Solar water	Yes	Yes
Rathfriland HS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Richmond PS, Ballygawley	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Dungannon PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Killylea PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Churchill PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Ballytrea PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Blessed Patrick O'Loughlin	Photovoltaic	Yes	No

School Name	Energy Source	(I) Electricity	(II) Useable Heat
Donacloney PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Our Lady's & St Mochuas, Derrynoose	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Birches PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Drumhillery PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Bleary PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Bronte PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Lissan PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Fair Hill PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Roan PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
	Ground Source HP	No	Yes
Derrylatinee PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
	Ground Source Heat Pump	No	Yes

School Name	Energy Source	(i) Electricity	(ii) Useable Heat
Aughnacloy PS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Fivemiletown HS	Photovoltaic	Yes	No
Howard PS	Photovoltaic Wind turbine	Yes	No

In addition, 89% of schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area are supplied with their mains electricity under an eco energy tariff (i.e. electricity from a renewable source).

Renewable Energy Resources

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the advice; and (ii) the financial support, available to schools that wish to use renewable energy resources. (AQW 5744/08)

The Minister of Education: Advice on renewable energy resources is provided to the education sector by the Education and Library Boards' Energy and Environmental Officers. In addition, in November 2007, the department and the Boards undertook a series of energy awareness seminars for schools, which included advice on renewable energy, were held at venues throughout the North of Ireland. Advice is also provided through school awareness visits undertaken by Action Renewables which has the role of promotion and development of renewable energy.

Tá an Roinn ag maoiniú láithreán gréasáin (www.nisustainablelearning.info) a chuireann comhairle ar fhuinneamh in-athnuaite ar fáil do scoileanna chomh maith.

The Department is funding a website (www.nisustainablelearning.info) which also provides schools with advice on renewable energy.

Financial support is considered on an individual basis dependent upon available resources. Schools have been able to apply for funding through a range of bodies and agencies, such as the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Energy Efficiency Fund, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Switched on Schools initiative, NIE, Low Carbon Building Design Programme Phase 1 and 2, and the Department of Education's Major and Minor Works capital programme.

Vacancy Control Policy

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the impact her department's vacancy control policy is having on service support and delivery to schools. (AQW 5753/08)

The Minister of Education: The Vacancy Control Policy is a requirement arising from the 2nd Guiding Principle on Managing Vacancies Effectively, issued by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and accepted by the Executive on 17 January 2008. Its objective is to minimise the risk of redundancies arising from the RPA.

The operation of this policy is primarily for existing employers. It is monitored on an ongoing basis by existing employers and the ESA Implementation Team to ensure its operation does not have an adverse impact on service delivery.

Modhnaíodh an beartas i Meán Fómhair 2007 le dáta nua bunaithe ÚOS a léiriú agus le soiléiriú a dhéanamh ar na poist a chuimseofar sa bheartas. Tá poist scoilbhunaithe agus poist túsline taobh amuigh dá shainchúram agus is féidir iad a líonadh ar an ghnáthdhóigh.

The policy was modified in September 2007 to reflect the new date for the establishment of ESA and to provide clarity on the posts included within the policy. School based and other front-line posts are outside its remit and can be filled as normal.

Welfare Officers

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of vacancies there are for education welfare officers in each Education and Library Board. (AQW 5754/08)

The Minister of Education: Is mar seo a leanas atá an cas a thuairiscigh na Boird:

The position reported by the Boards is as follows:

ELB area	Vacancies*
BELB	2
WELB	2
NEELB	0
SELB	0
SEELB	9

* All grades

Educational Psychologists

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of vacancies there are for educational psychologists in each Education and Library Board. (AQW 5755/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé curtha in iúl domh ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLí) gur mar seo a leanas atá líon na gcoibhéiseanna folúntas lánaimseartha i rannán síceolaíochta oideachais gach BOL ar 31 Márta 2008:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that the number of full time equivalent vacancies in each ELB's educational psychology section, as at 31 March 2008, is as follows:-

BELB	2
NEELB	5
SEELB3	5
SELB	0
WELB	4

Irish Books

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education detail the books that are provided for (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools for teaching Irish. (AQW 5757/08)

The Minister of Education: My department does not hold details of the books provided for the teaching of Irish, as it is for schools to decide which books they use in delivering the curriculum and to provide for them.

Mar fhreagra ar riachtanas a aithníodh, leithdháil mo Roinn £67,000 ar Bhord Oideachais agus

Leabharlainne an Deiscirt, ar son gach Boird, le hacmhainn fhóirsteanach a fhorbairt a thacódh le teagasc na Gaeilge ag Eochairchéim 3. Cuirfear seo ar fáil do scoileanna amach anseo sa bhliain.

In response to an identified need, my Department has allocated £67,000 to the Southern Education and Library Board, on behalf of all Boards, for the development of a suitable resource to support the teaching of Irish at Key Stage 3. This will be provided to schools later this year.

Educational Welfare Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each Education and Library Board, the number of (i) educational welfare officers currently employed; and (ii) current vacancies for this position. (AQW 5759/08)

The Minister of Education: Is mar seo a leanas atá an cas a thuairiscigh na Boird:

The position reported by the Boards is as follows:

ELB area	Education and Welfare Officer staff in post*	Vacancies
BELB	33	2
WELB	34	2
SELB	36	0
NEELB	35	0
SEELB	15	9

* All grades

Teaching Posts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each Education and Library Board, the number of vacant teaching posts there are for (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools. (AQW 5760/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of teachers is the responsibility of teachers' employers and, under LMS funding arrangements it is a matter for Boards of Governors of individual schools to decide on the level of staffing in the school.

The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information in relation to current teaching vacancies in controlled schools in their respective area:

Board	Primary	Post-Primary
BELB	6 permanent, 3 temporary	3 permanent, 1 temporary

Board	Primary	Post-Primary
WELB	3 permanent, 2 temporary	8 permanent, 1 temporary
SELB	4 permanent, 4 temporary	11 permanent, 7 temporary
NEELB	6 permanent, 2 temporary	12 permanent, 7 temporary
SEELB	9 permanent, 6 temporary	19 permanent, 5 temporary
Total	42 permanent, 6 temporary	68 permanent, 5 temporary

Ní choinníonn na Boird eolas ar fholúntais in earnálacha na scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil, na scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí agus na scoileanna Imeasctha faoi Chothabháil Stáit.

The Boards do not hold information on vacancies in the Catholic maintained, Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated school sectors.

Northgate

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the value of the five-year contract signed in November 2007 between C2KNI and Northgate; (ii) the services provided by Northgate; and (iii) the breakdown in value of those services provided, under the terms of the contract. (AQW 5770/08)

The Minister of Education: No contract was awarded in November 2007. The Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board has informed me that a contract worth £31 million was signed with Northgate Information Solutions in November 2006. That contract, known as Lot 6, provides for a refresh of primary schools' Classroom 2000 equipment, including a fully managed service for the five-year term of the contract.

An option within the contract to provide additional laptops to schools was taken up in May 2007 when I announced that over 20,000 laptops would be distributed to all schools in the current school year.

Cuimsítear 5,000 ríomhaire glúine breise a soláthraíodh do bhunscoileanna i bhfómhar na bliana 2007 le measúnú ríomhchuidithe a éascú, sa rogha seo, ar fiú £18 milliún san iomlán í.

A further 5,000 laptops supplied to primary schools in autumn 2007 to facilitate computer-based assessment also fall within this option, the total value of which is £18 million.

ICT Management Services

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the terms of the tendering process under which Northgate successfully bid for the contract to supply ICT management services to C2KNI. (AQW 5771/08)

The Minister of Education: Is ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthuaiscirt (BOLIT) atá freagracht as na conarthaí do sheirbhís bhainistithe TEC do scoileanna. Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach BOLIT in iúl domh gur stiúradh próiseas tairisceana an chonartha le seirbhís TEC a sholáthar do bhunscoileanna, inar éirigh le Northgate Information Systems, de réir Rialachán Soláthair Phoiblí an AE.

The contracts for the ICT managed service to schools are the responsibility of the Western Education and Library Board (WELB). The Chief Executive of the WELB has informed me that the tendering process for the contract to supply ICT services to primary schools, for which Northgate Information Systems was the successful bidder, was conducted according to EU Public Procurement Regulations.

The contract was awarded in November 2006. I have deposited a detailed history of the procurement process for this contract in the Assembly Library.

Glastry School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale for departmental approval to commence work on the new build for Glastry school. (AQW 5802/08)

The Minister of Education: Planning of the proposed new school for Glastry College is at the stage of an initial sketch plan which was submitted to the department by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) in March 2008.

Dheimhnigh an Bord gur dócha go mbeidh earrach na bliana 2009 ann sula geríochnófar na céimeanna sonraithe pleanála atá fágtha agus na ceaduithe riachtanacha reachtúla faighte le go féidir tús a chur leis an tógáil ar an láithreán sin.

The Board has confirmed that it is likely to be spring 2009 before all the remaining detailed planning stages have been completed and the necessary statutory approvals are in place to allow construction work to start on site.

Movilla High School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale for the appointment of the new principal for Movilla High School. (AQW 5803/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of a Principal to Movilla High School is a matter for the employing authority, which in case is the South Eastern and Education Library Board (SEELB). The board has indicated that two recruitment campaigns were held during the 2007/08 academic year without a successful candidate being appointed.

The Board of Governors in conjunction with the SEELB has recently offered the position, on a fixed term basis for two years, to a currently serving Principal who will take up post at the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year. The school in which this Principal is currently employed will close on 31 August 2008.

Táthar ag súil go gcuirfidh Bord na nGobharnóirí tús le próiseas earcaíochta do Phríomhoide buan go luath sa bhliain 2010 ionas go gceapfar Príomhoide nua do thús na bliana acadúla 2010/11.

It is anticipated that the Board of Governors will commence a recruitment process for a permanent Principal in early 2010 in order that a new Principal is appointed for the beginning of the 2010/11 academic year.

Parkhall College

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education to provide (i) an update on the provision of a new school building for Parkhall College; and (ii) a timescale within which the project will be completed. (AQW 5823/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá pleanáil an fhoirgnimh nua scoile do Choláiste Parkhall ar aghaidh go maith, agus faoi láthair tathar ag fanacht le costais athmheasta Chéim D (céim dheiridh an deartha) ó Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt.

Planning of the new school building for Parkhall College is well advanced, with final design stage costs currently awaited from the North Eastern Education and Library Board. Subject to these being submitted to the Department shortly in the near future and being satisfactory, it is estimated that construction work on the new building could start on site by the end of the year with an estimated two years to completion.

Integrated Status

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail, by parliamentary constituency, the schools

which have current applications for integrated status. (AQW 5860/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi láthair tá ceithre Moltaí Forbartha ann maidir le moltaí le hathrú go stádas rialaithe imeasctha. Is iad na scoileanna:

There are currently four Development Proposals in respect of proposals for transformation to controlled integrated status. The schools are:

Suffolk Primary School which is in the Belfast West constituency, Donaghadee High School, which is in the Strangford constituency, Ballymoney Model Primary School, which is in the North Antrim constituency and Staidhavern Primary School in the South Antrim constituency.

Transferors Representative Council

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of meetings she has held with the Transferors Representative Council. (AQW 5861/08)

The Minister of Education: Bhuaill mé le Comhairle Ionadaithe na nAistreoirí dhá uair— ar an 14 Bealtaine 2007 agus ar an 17 Nollaig 2007.

To date, I have met with the Transferors Representative Council on two occasions – 14 May 2007 and 17 December 2007.

Rural Proofing

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to ensure that all departmental policies are rural-proofed. (AQW 5869/08)

The Minister of Education: A key factor in all of the Department's work, including policy development, is to ensure equality of access to educational provision and services, and that includes addressing the needs of those in rural areas. This will be a significant feature, for example, in the arrangements for area-based planning that are currently being developed.

Ta sé fosta ar thiománaithe na gcomharpháirtíochtaí atá mar bhun agus thaca ag soláthar an Chreat Teidlíochta, a bhfuil sé mar aidhm aige réimse i bhfad níos leithne roghanna curaclaim a bhaint amach do dhaltaí ná bheadh ar fáil ar ghnáthmhodhanna.

It is also one of the drivers for the collaborative partnerships underpinning the delivery of the Entitlement Framework, which aims to secure a much wider range of curricular options for pupils than would be available by conventional means.

Employer Liability Cover

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education to confirm (i) if all transport providers to Education and Library Boards retain Employer Liability Cover; and (ii) if such liability is specified within the terms and conditions of the tendering process. (AQW 5884/08)

The Minister of Education: All Education and Library Boards have confirmed that it is a legal requirement for Private Operators to retain Employer Liability Insurance. With the exception of the Belfast Board, all other Boards specify the requirement to hold Employer Liability Insurance in the terms and conditions of all of their contracts.

Cé go n-éilíonn Bord Bhéal Feirste an tÁrachas seo, ní liostaítear go sainiúil é i dtéarmaí agus i gcoinníollacha a chonarthaí.

While this Insurance is required by the Belfast Board it is not specifically listed in the terms and conditions of its contracts. Instead, the Board includes a clause that states that 'Contractors shall comply with all statutory and other provisions to be observed and performed in connection with the Service and shall indemnify the Board against all actions, claims demands, proceedings, damages, costs, charges and expenses whatsoever in respect of any breach by the Contractor of this Condition'.

School Transport

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why the contract for home to school transport for Ceara Special School, Lurgan, awarded to Eurocoach (NI) Ltd until June 2008, was terminated. (AQW 5889/08)

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to provide comparative costings including (i) capital; (ii) depreciation; and (iii) revenue, to run and operate the new service, put in place for Ceara Special School, Lurgan, which replaced the home to school transport service held by Eurocoach (NI) Ltd. (AQW 5890/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó chuir Comhalta Fhear Manach agus Thír Eoghain Theas dhá cheist faoi sholáthar iompair do Scoil Speisialta an Cheara, tabharfaidh mé freagra orthu in éineacht.

As the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone has asked two questions in relation to transport provision for Ceara Special School I shall reply to these together.

The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that it currently operates two distinct and different types of home to school transport contracts. Where services are predicted to remain static, fixed term contracts are put in place for periods of up to

3 years. In other situations the Board needs to have flexible contracting arrangements in order to respond to changing demands for home to school transport. This is particularly relevant to the provision of transport to children with Special Educational Needs. The second form of contract permits the Board to terminate any contract by giving one week's notice only.

The run referred to was awarded to Eurocoach under these more flexible conditions. Due to changing operational circumstance the Board identified spare capacity within its own fleet which could be utilised to operate at Ceara Special School. The operator was originally given 4 weeks notice to terminate the contract. Further to discussions with the operator the Board granted another 4 weeks' notice to allow the operator time to identify alternative work.

The Board has also advised that the comparative costings are not available as the service is being operated from within its existing compliment of vehicles and drivers. As a result of the reorganisation of services, the Board has not incurred any additional expenditure and fully expects to realise efficiencies in the region of £24,000 per annum.

Nursery Provision

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 10 years, the capital funding made available for nursery provision from EU Programme funds for (i) the controlled sector; (ii) the maintained sector; and (iii) the integrated sector. (AQW 5906/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an maoiniú caipitil a cuireadh ar fáil do sholáthar na naiscolaíochta ó chistí Chláir AE do (i) an earnáil rialaithe; (ii) an earnáil faoi chothabháil; agus (iii) an earnáil imeasctha do gach ceann de na deich mbliana dheireanacha leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

Capital funding made available for nursery provision from EU Programme funds for (i) the controlled sector; (ii) the maintained sector; and (iii) the integrated sector for each of the last 10 years is set out in the table below.

	Controlled	Maintained	Integrated
1998	£336,410.00	£1,007,921.26	£0.00
1999	£261,741.06	£1,048,979.17	£0.00
2000	£706,489.25	£881,544.84	£36,765.86
2001	£2,094,728.68	£1,347,505.14	£60,727.62
2002	£1,251,089.15	£1,036,024.71	£111,788.89
2003	£630,011.14	£374,395.87	£3,127.50
2004	£12,001.82	£379,948.58	£0.00
2005	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

	Controlled	Maintained	Integrated
2006	£0.00	£2,999.74	£0.00
2007	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

Education Village

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) any information pertaining to the financing of the proposed education village on the military site of St Lucia in Omagh; and (ii) the financial requirements that will be placed upon the schools wishing to partake in the venture from (a) the controlled sector; and (b) the maintained sector, should it become a viable option. (AQW 5929/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é suíomh Lios an Eala, chan N. Lucia, an láthair atá molta don tsráidbhaile oideachais. Bhí an ChéadAire agus an Leas-ChéadAire ag iarraidh ar Rialtas na Breataine an suíomh a dheonú agus táthar go fóill ag fanacht le freagra.

The proposed location for the educational village is the Lisanelly site not St Lucia. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have been pursuing the gifting of the site from the British Government and a response is still awaited.

This is a very important project and deserves Executive support. A business case will be prepared to examine the options for the development of Lisanelly and the nearby St Lucia which will include the anticipated costs and benefits of an educational campus.

As with any school building project involving a site relocation, and where funding is provided to cover site and building costs, the relevant school authorities would be expected to dispose of their existing sites once the schools had relocated. The receipts realised should offset some of costs of the project. The subsequent development of the sites would also support wider regeneration in Omagh.

Education Village

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to confirm if the schools that have shown an interest in the proposed education village in Omagh will be required to sell their current sites and provide this finance for the development of the village. (AQW 5945/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é suíomh Lios an Eala, chan N. Lucia, an láthair atá molta don tsráidbhaile oideachais. Bhí an ChéadAire agus an Leas-ChéadAire ag iarraidh ar Rialtas na Breataine

an suíomh a dheonú agus táthar go fóill ag fanacht le freagra.

The proposed location for the educational village is the Lisanelly site not St Lucia. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have been pursuing the gifting of the site from the British Government and a response is still awaited.

This is a very important project and deserves Executive support. A business case will be prepared to examine the options for the development of Lisanelly and the nearby St Lucia which will include the anticipated costs and benefits of an educational campus.

As with any school building project involving a site relocation, and where funding is provided to cover site and building costs, the relevant school authorities would be expected to dispose of their existing sites once the schools had relocated. The receipts realised should offset some of costs of the project. The subsequent development of the sites would also support wider regeneration in Omagh.

Education Village

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail what will happen to finance generated by the sale of the school sites in Omagh, owned by the controlled and maintained sectors, should the schools move to the one site at the proposed education village on the former military site at St Lucia Barracks. (AQW 5946/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é suíomh Lios an Eala, chan N. Lucia, an láthair atá molta don tsráidbhaile oideachais. Bhí an ChéadAire agus an Leas-ChéadAire ag iarraidh ar Rialtas na Breataine an suíomh a dheonú agus táthar go fóill ag fanacht le freagra.

The proposed location for the educational village is the Lisanelly site not St Lucia. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have been pursuing the gifting of the site from the British Government and a response is still awaited.

This is a very important project and deserves Executive support. A business case will be prepared to examine the options for the development of Lisanelly and the nearby St Lucia which will include the anticipated costs and benefits of an educational campus.

As with any school building project involving a site relocation, and where funding is provided to cover site and building costs, the relevant school authorities would be expected to dispose of their existing sites once the schools had relocated. The receipts realised should offset some of costs of the project. The subsequent development of the sites would also support wider regeneration in Omagh.

Youth Workers

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of youth workers based in North Belfast who are funded by her department; and (ii) the organisations in which these youth workers are based. (AQW 5964/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Belfast and North Eastern Education and Library Boards and the Bytes Project which employ youth workers in the North Belfast constituency.

Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste agus Stiúrthóir na mBeart an t-eolas seo a leanas ar fáil faoi líon na n-oibrithe don aos óg atá ag obair sa cheantar agus na heagraíochtaí ina bhfuil siad bunaithe:

The Chief Executives of the Belfast and North Eastern Education and Library Boards and the Director of Bytes provided the following information on the number of youth workers deployed in the constituency and the organisations in which they are based:

	Full – time youth workers posts	Part – time youth workers posts	Youth Workers Posts Funded by
Newlodge Bytes	2	1	Bytes Project
North Belfast Area Project	8	0	BELB
Fortwilliam Youth Club	1	7	BELB
Mountcollyer Youth Club	0	1	BELB
NewLodge Youth Club	1	3	BELB
Ardoyne Youth Club	1	6	BELB
Holy Family Youth Centre	1	6	BELB
JohnPaul II Youth Club	1	5	BELB
CairnLodge Youth Club	0	4	BELB
Mountainhill Youth Club	0	6	BELB
Deanby Youth Club	0	5	BELB
Woodvale Youth Club	0	2	BELB
Newtownabbey Phab	0	3	NEELB
Rathcoole Youth Centre	1	8	NEELB
Millgreen Youth Centre	1	7	NEELB

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to give a timescale within which she intends to reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 5993/08)

The Minister of Education: In the interests of local accountability, it would be appropriate that the members of the SEELB Board should resume their former responsibilities. However, it is essential to ensure that there would be no return to the difficulties which the Commissioners inherited when they were appointed in July 2006 and that the stability which has since been achieved is sustained.

On 8 April 2008 I had a very useful meeting with the Council nominees on the Board to discuss their readiness and willingness to take up their formal responsibilities and to deliver those effectively. I subsequently held a meeting with the other members of the South Eastern Education and Library Board on 21 April 2008, to advise them of the outcome of the 8 April discussions and to seek their views.

I ndiaidh an phlé dhearfaigh ag an dá chruinniú seo, ba mhaith liom anois na ceistanna éagsúla a thóg comhaltaí boird a bhreithniú go cúramach leis an bealach chun tosaigh a chinneadh. Is é an cuspóir a bheith in ann cinneadh deiridh a dhéanamh a luaithe is féidir; roimh an tsamhradh, de rogha.

Following the constructive discussions at both these meetings, I now want to give careful consideration to the various issues raised by board members in determining the way forward. The objective is to be able to reach a final decision as soon as possible; preferably before the summer.

Children Statemented

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail any change in the statementing process for children in the last three years. (AQW 5994/08)

The Minister of Education: The introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order in September 2005 brought about significant changes to the statementing process for children.

The new provisions, which affect the statementing process, are to:

- strengthen the rights of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to be educated in ordinary schools where parents want this and the interests of other children can be protected;

- specify the circumstances whereby a child, without a Statement of SEN, can be placed in, and remain in, a special school;
- require Boards to provide a means of resolving disputes with parents and schools/Boards;
- require Boards to comply, within prescribed periods as laid down in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, with orders of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal. The Regulations also make other technical changes in support of the Tribunal appeals process and the statementing process;
- allow parents to appeal to the Tribunal where another body has requested a statutory assessment.

To further strengthen the statementing process the Department issued, in September 2005, the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. These imposed upon Education and Library Boards time limits, subject to exceptions, for the making of statutory assessments and statements.

Bhí treoir shonraithe do Bhoird, do scoileanna agus do thuismitheoirí maidir leis na forálacha úra seo mar

pháirt den Fhorlíonadh den Chód Cleachtais chun Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais a Aithint agus a Mheas, cáipéis a eisíodh i Meán Fómhair 2005 fosta. Tá cóip de sin i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

Detailed guidance, for Boards, schools and parents, to these new provisions was contained in the Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, also issued in September 2005. A copy of this is in the Assembly Library.

Staff Absence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in her department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6011/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

		Working Days							
		More than 5	More than 10	More than 15	More than 20	More than 25	More than 30	More than 35	More than 40
2003 2004									
Grade	AA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	AO	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	2
	EO2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
Grade	EO1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	SO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	DP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	GR 7	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	GR 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

		Working Days							
		More than 5	More than 10	More than 15	More than 20	More than 25	More than 30	More than 35	More than 40
2004 2005									
Grade	AA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	AO	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
	EO2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
	EO1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
	SO	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	DP	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	GR 7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	GR 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

		Working Days							
		More than 5	More than 10	More than 15	More than 20	More than 25	More than 30	More than 35	More than 40
2005 2006									
Grade	AA	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
	AO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	EO2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
	EO1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	SO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	DP	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	GR 7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	GR 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2006 2007									
Grade	AA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	AO	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	EO2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	EO1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Grade	SO	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	DP	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
	GR 7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2007 2008									

Grade	AA	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	AO	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	EO2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	EO1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	SO	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1
	DP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	GR 7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GR 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of staff in her department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6042/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Number of Official Warnings issued			Number of staff who faced disciplinary procedures
Sickness Absence Warnings		Other Warnings	
Written	Final Written		
15	1	1	
Total: 16		Total: 1	
Total all Warnings: 17			Total: 2

Sure Start Programme

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to detail the catchment area for the Newtownabbey Sure Start programme. (AQW 6069/08)

The Minister of Education: Cumhdaíonn suíomhanna Sure Start Bhaile Nua na Mainistreach na scoilcheantar seo a leanas anois:

Newtownabbey Sure Start sites now cover the following catchment areas:

Abbots Cross Site, covering Rathcoole Whitehouse and Dunanney; St James' Site, covering Cloghfern, Abbeyville and Glenville; Mill Green / CLASP Sites, covering Bawnmore, Longlands and Valley; Monkstown Site, covering the Monkstown Ward.

Revised Curriculum

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the action she will take against any school attempting to divert feeder primary schools from teaching the revised curriculum. (AQW 6075/08)

The Minister of Education: I am working to build an education system that gives all children a fair chance of achieving their full potential, and the revised curriculum is a key part of this.

All schools have a statutory duty to deliver the revised curriculum and must discharge this responsibility, irrespective of any other provision which they make. Where a school does not discharge its statutory duty, there are provisions within Education legislation to ensure that it does so.

Bheadh súil agam nach bhféachfadh aon scoil le bunscoileanna a chlaonadh ó theagasc an churaclaim athbhreithnithe agus chuirfinn go mór in aghaidh a leithéid de ghníomhaíocht. Ní cheadóidh mo Roinn aon chur isteach ar sholáthar an churaclaim athbhreithnithe i mbunscoileanna.

I would hope that no school would attempt to divert primary schools from teaching the revised curriculum and would strongly discourage such action. My Department will not allow any interference with the delivery of the revised curriculum in primary schools.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Undergraduate Drop-Out Cost

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the estimated cost to universities of undergraduates who failed to complete their courses, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5466/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Northern Ireland universities receive

government funding mainly through block grant allocations from the Department for Employment and Learning. They also obtain income from student fees and external sources. Block grant allocations are in the main linked to target outcomes in terms of student numbers which are measured annually in December.

The universities do not collate information on the costs of students who withdraw from their courses early. Each case is unique and so there are clear difficulties in producing consistent and reliable data. In addition, even where a student withdraws, the institution will already have incurred costs during recruitment and throughout the student's period of attendance at the university. The following table shows the outcome if an average rate of institutional block grant funding is applied to the number of full – time first degree entrants who are no longer in higher education the following year. Clearly however this approach takes no account of the length of time a student has been in attendance at an institution and so these figures should be treated as very much an upper limit of the cost to the universities.

Academic Year	Number of full – time first degree entrants no longer in Higher Education	Number multiplied by average block grant per Full Time Equivalent
2006/07	Data not yet available	-
2005/06	Data not yet available	-
2004/05	955	4,138,970
2003/04	1,020	3,930,060
2002/03	850	3,080,400
2001/02	740	2,652,900
2000/01	585	1,982,565

Source: HE Performance Indicators HESA and HEFCE

Careers Advice Service

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the progress being made by the department towards putting in place a careers advice service to meet the needs of people with disabilities. (AQW 5955/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Through the Careers Service, my Department currently provides an all-age careers information, advice and guidance service throughout Northern Ireland. This is delivered by professionally qualified Careers Advisers including a number who are specially trained to support people with disabilities. A joint Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy is currently being finalised with the Department of Education. The strategy aims to develop effective career decision makers leading to

increased participation in education, training and employment and has a priority focus on clients who are at risk of social exclusion, including those with a disability. The final strategy and implementation plan are due to issue in early summer 2008.

Skills Base

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how Northern Ireland's skill base compares with other regions of the United Kingdom. (AQW 5988/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Using level of qualification as a proxy measure for skills it is possible to make comparisons between Northern Ireland and the other regions of the United Kingdom.

The following table sets out the population of working age by highest qualification attained for each UK region.

POPULATION OF WORKING AGE¹ BY HIGHEST EQUIVALENT NVQ QUALIFICATION ATTAINED AND UK REGION, OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2007

Region	No Qualifications	NVQ Level 1	NVQ Level 2	NVQ Level 3	NVQ Level 4+	Total
North East	13%	17%	24%	23%	23%	100%
North West	13%	17%	23%	20%	27%	100%
Yorkshire & Humber	13%	19%	23%	20%	25%	100%
East Midlands	13%	21%	23%	20%	24%	100%
West Midlands	15%	18%	22%	18%	26%	100%
Eastern	11%	20%	23%	19%	27%	100%
London	12%	17%	18%	15%	37%	100%
South East	9%	18%	22%	20%	31%	100%
South West	8%	18%	22%	23%	29%	100%
Wales	15%	16%	24%	20%	26%	100%
Scotland	12%	13%	20%	20%	34%	100%
Northern Ireland	21%	11%	23%	19%	26%	100%
UK	12%	18%	22%	19%	29%	100%

¹ Working age refers to ages 16 to 59 for females and 16-64 for males

Source: Labour Force Survey, October – December 2007

Staff Absence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in his department that were absent

due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade.
(AQW 6013/08)

sickness absence was due to stress during the 5 years commencing April 2003.

Please see the table attached which provides a yearly breakdown by duration of absence and grade.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

A total of 123 DEL employees reported that their

SIR REG EMPEY MLA

MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Year	Grade	PERIOD OF ABSENCE (in days)								Total number of staff
		5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	
03/04	Cas AA									0
	AA									0
	AO	1			1			1	2	5
	EO2		1			1			1	3
	EO1			1			1		1	3
	SO								2	2
	DP									0
	G7+									0
04/05	Cas AA									0
	AA									0
	AO							1	3	4
	EO2	1	1		2				3	7
	EO1	1								1
	SO									0
	DP									0
	G7+									0
05/06	Cas AA									0
	AA									0
	AO					2			3	5
	EO2			1	1			1	6	9
	EO1			2						2
	SO					1				1
	DP									0
	G7+									0
06/07	Cas AA									0
	AA						1			1
	AO	1		3	2				8	14
	EO2	1		3	2			1	7	14
	EO1									0
	SO									0
	DP		1						4	5
	G7+									0

Year	Grade	PERIOD OF ABSENCE (in days)								Total number of staff
		5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	
07/08	Cas AA									0
	AA							1	3	4
	AO	1			1	2	2		12	18
	EO2	2		1	1		1		7	12
	EO1				2				2	4
	SO	1			1				4	6
	DP			1					1	2
	G7+								1	1
Total										123

PhD Projects

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the PhD projects he intends to fund in universities from 2008 to 2009.(AQW 6081/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Each year my Department makes available funding to the Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster for research and for certain approved courses of study leading to higher degrees (Masters and PhDs). Under existing arrangements the Department funds a total of 495 PhD places (165 new entrants per annum).

As stated in the Programme for Government, the Department is also committed to increasing the number of PhD research places it funds by 300 (to 795) by 2010. The additional places must be targeted at areas of economic relevance.

For Academic Year 2008-09, these additional 100 places will be allocated to research that addresses issues of economic relevance in any of the following economic and skills priority areas: Agri-food, life and health sciences (including behavioural), advanced materials, engineering, information and communication technologies, electronics, software engineering, construction, creative media and financial services. The focus of the additional places, for future academic years, will be subject to the outcome of the current review of Postgraduate Policy and Funding due to report by end July 2008.

Further Education Colleges

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the financial cost of merging the Further Education colleges into six bodies; and (ii) the financial savings that have been achieved through these mergers. (AQW 6124/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The position remains largely as stated in my response to the honourable member's Assembly Question (Written) 79/08. While the six colleges merged formally on 1 August 2007, the restructuring process has only been completed at senior management levels. The wider re-organisation of the colleges is still being implemented during the course of the current academic year. A business case, which would enable colleges to make some 240 staff redundant using the Teachers' Premature Retirement Scheme, is currently under consideration. While these redundancies would have an initial cost, they would also deliver significant future efficiency savings. Therefore, a complete analysis of the financial cost and savings is not yet available.

It is still anticipated that costs associated with the college mergers will be offset by efficiency savings in subsequent years.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of meetings he has held with representatives from Stranmillis University College in the last 6 months. (AQW 6316/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I have held no meetings with representatives from Stranmillis University College in the past six months to discuss Departmental related business. I met with senior college management during a visit to the college on 27 September 2007.

Proposed Merger

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, for the last 6 months, the meetings his department has had with representatives from

(i) Queen's University, Belfast; and (ii) Stranmillis University College, in relation to a possible merger between the 2 institutions. (AQW 6319/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

As you would expect my Department has regular discussions with both Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College about a range of issues. One meeting was held between senior officials of the Department and Queen's University Belfast about potential options for the College and one meeting between senior officials of the Department and Stranmillis University College about potential options for the College.

Proposed Merger

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail all the meetings he has attended in the last 6 months in relation to the proposed merger of Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College. (AQW 6320/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I have attended no meetings in the last six months in relation to the proposed merger of Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College.

Proposed Merger

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail when he was made aware that a meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 17 April 2008, at which a proposed merger between Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College was to be discussed. (AQW 6321/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I was made aware at the beginning of April 2008 that a meeting of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College was to be held on 17 April at which a number of options for the future direction of the College were to be discussed.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Environment and Renewable Energy Fund

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the amount of funding that was available through the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund; (ii) the expenditure to date, explaining

the full allocation of funds to all projects; and (iii) the cut off date for the fund. (AQW 5533/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds):

- (i) The Environment and Renewable Energy Fund (EREF), a direct rule initiative, had available a budget of £59.2 million.
- (ii) The expenditure to date is £35.055 million, with 2007/08 payments still being accrued. A breakdown of allocation to all projects is detailed in the attached table.
- (iii) The cut off date for the ring-fenced fund was 31 March 2008.

Electricity Generators

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the public consultation that was carried out in establishing the bidding code of practice for electricity generators, seeking to supply electricity to the new single electricity market; and (ii) the public consultation that would be required should the Utility Regulator wish to alter the bidding code that has been agreed. (AQW 5752/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Consultation on the draft Bidding Code of Practice for generation companies in the Single Electricity Market (SEM) was carried out by the two Regulatory Authorities from 18 May 2007 to 15 June 2007 as part of the development of the trading arrangements for the SEM. This drew on an earlier paper by the Regulatory Authorities on Market Power Mitigation in the SEM: Bidding Principles and local market power that was issued on 6 July 2006 and discussions with the industry. A total of ten interested parties responded to the consultation paper of 18 May 2007, including NIE, Premier Power and Viridian Power and Energy.

No changes to the Bidding Code of Practice have been proposed at this stage. The SEM Committee of the Regulatory Authority has a responsibility to consult with all interested parties in advance of any decisions, in keeping with best regulatory practice, if any changes to the Bidding Code of Practice are proposed.

Private Sector Deal

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the action he intends to take to help the private sector deal with the slowdown in the economy. (AQW 5787/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I recognise that the current global economic conditions present us with enormous challenges, and

have recently commented on these in the spring edition of DETI's Quarterly Economic Review.

The slowdown being experienced in many of the world's developed economies once again emphasises the importance of ensuring the competitiveness of businesses locally. It was in the context of this slowdown, that I made increasing private sector productivity my Department's top priority when the Executive was developing the Programme for Government (PfG). The actions and targets contained in the PfG were framed in the light of the prevailing economic conditions and the uncertainties in the financial markets at that time.

Over the lifetime of the PfG, DETI will target investment to increase innovation and exports, and improve energy and telecoms infrastructure. The Department will also seek to promote enterprise and attract Foreign Direct Investment which will provide further business opportunities for the private sector locally. I believe that these, and other initiatives flowing from the PfG, will help place Northern Ireland based businesses in a stronger competitive position to deal with the current economic slowdown.

Tourist Board Advertising

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of money spent by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) in advertising each county in Northern Ireland; and to confirm if the NITB recently advertised Northern Ireland in Dublin based newspapers without mentioning County Tyrone. (AQW 5841/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between January and March 2008, NITB undertook a fully integrated marketing campaign in the Republic of Ireland, drawing on the findings of recent research in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and taking account of available product including bed stock. It is not possible to provide county by county expenditure figures. NITB spent £868,000 on this campaign as a whole.

The campaign was structured to include generic Northern Ireland features that promoted the destination as a whole, region-specific features in association with the Regional Tourism Partnerships, which provided more in depth information on a region by region basis, and Signature Project features that were designed to provide consumer focused interpretation of these developments.

Within the region-specific features NITB worked with the Western Regional Tourism Partnership to develop individual area-specific features for their members.

Co Tyrone and the Sperrins received significant coverage:

- i. Within Northern Ireland, generic features including coverage in press advertorials, press inserts and direct mail.
- ii. Region-specific features as part of the Western Regional Tourism Partnership in national press in the Irish Republic.
- iii. Area-specific features on Tyrone and the Sperrins in regional press in the Irish Republic.

An article appeared recently in the local press which wrongly claimed that NITB had ran adverts in the Irish Times which ignored County Tyrone. In fact the advert in question listed the Sperrins under the 'Don't Miss' section.

Tyrone and the Sperrins have received substantial positive coverage within this campaign, and NITB will continue to work with the Regional Tourism Partnership to grow business in this key market.

Northern Ireland Produce

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the action his department has taken to promote Northern Ireland produce locally, since May 2007. (AQW 5842/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is precluded by EU State Aid rules to directly promote locally processed food within the Northern Ireland region. Instead the focus is to promote locally processed food to the priority near markets of Great Britain, Scotland and the Irish Republic and also to International markets.

Since May 2007, my Department, through Invest NI, has continued to work indirectly with locally and nationally based retail multiples and food service organisations to assist with local sourcing initiatives for Northern Ireland processed food. Officials have also jointly approved with DARD approximately 40 applications from locally based food trade associations such as the Northern Ireland Food & Drink Association, the Ulster Pork and Bacon Forum, the Livestock and Meat Commission, Dairy Council for funding from an EU approved Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme. This programme allows financial support for specified local promotion initiatives.

Village Tourism

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the action his department is taking to promote small village areas to tourists,

such as Ballycarry in the East Antrim constituency.
(AQW 5855/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:
NITB recognises that the diversity and character of Northern Ireland's small villages add to the overall positive experience of the cultural visitor to Northern Ireland.

The Causeway Coastal Route, completed in October 2007, passes through or adjacent to numerous small villages, including Ballycarry. As such these villages will receive increased visitor traffic and the associated benefits of providing services to visitors.

The Causeway Coast & Glens Regional Tourism Partnership, in partnership with NITB is about to complete a major technical assessment of interpretation, visitor facilities and services along the Causeway Coastal Route. This major piece of work will inform the next stage of infrastructure development at key sites, including small village areas, to identify the next delivery phase and bring the route up to world class standards.

A further major initiative is underway to provide a full interpretative solution at these key sites which will compel visitors to stay longer in the region through a mix of traditional interpretative solutions, cultural animation and events, public art and enhancements to the public realm. These projects will go some way to enhancing the visitor appeal of the region.

By investing in high quality, baseline infrastructure, it is anticipated that this will stimulate and encourage private sector entrepreneurship and investment, focused on villages and towns along the Causeway Coast Route

Northern Ireland Produce

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline his department's position in relation to the promotion of locally produced food.
(AQW 5862/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:
My Department is precluded by EU State Aid rules to promote locally produced food within the Northern Ireland region. Instead the focus is to promote locally produced food to the priority near markets of Great Britain, and the Irish Republic and also to International markets.

DETI recognises the size and importance of the Northern Ireland food processing sector and Invest NI have committed additional resource and appointed Food Marketing advisors in Great Britain, and the Irish Republic with their sole remit being promoting locally produced food in these markets.

My Department, through Invest NI, also deliver a comprehensive programme of food promotion

activity with multiple customised buyer events with major retailers and food service organisations, United Kingdom based and International Trade exhibitions and Trade Missions.

Locally Produced Food

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the co-operation that exists between his department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the promotion of locally produced food. (AQW 5863/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:
DETI, through Invest NI, continue to work closely with DARD in delivering the agreed Fit for Market strategy for the food sector and its recommendations on the promotion of locally produced food. In compliance with EU regulations on state aid, the focus is promoting locally produced food externally to the Northern Ireland marketplace.

In addition to regular meetings between Invest NI and DARD officials, details of co operation include joint membership of the "Domestic Marketing Industry Group" which developed the promotional campaign "Good food is in our Nature" now being taken forward by Food Promotion NI Limited, joint membership of the "International Image Industry Group" which produced an international image strategy for the sector, joint membership of the assessment panel for the "Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme", joint membership of the "Taste of Ulster Management Steering Committee."

Invest NI currently has a memorandum of agreement with DARD for co-operation on delivery of the "The Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG)" for 2007 – 2013 with Invest NI and DARD officials co-operating on the assessment of all eligible applications from food processing companies undertaking financial and business appraisal and technical assessment respectively. Officials from Invest NI and DARD are members of the awards panel. This co operation has existed for many years.

Invest NI is jointly funding and managing a number of international trade promotions with DARD agency the Livestock and Meat Commission with recent successful trade promotions of locally produced red meat to Italy, Sweden, and Denmark and planned joint missions to Spain and Czech Republic for locally produced pork. The Italian mission has produces £10m sales to date.

I have also recently agreed with the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development to establish an Interdepartmental Group of senior officials to maintain the momentum and co operation and to liaise with an Industry Advisory Panel.

Biofuels

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of bio-fuel that has been imported in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 5885/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Until the introduction of the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) throughout the UK on 15 April 2008 there was no requirement on transport fuel suppliers to provide information about the origins of the biofuels they supply. The information is therefore not available for NI or even for the UK as a whole. Under the reporting requirements of the RTFO, transport fuel suppliers who wish to earn Renewable Transport Fuel certificates will now be required to submit reports to the UK Renewable Fuels Agency. These reports will cover matters such as the country of origin and the wider sustainability aspects of the biofuels supplied.

Hightown Road Bridge

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of businesses from the Glengormley/Mallusk area that have contacted his department to report a negative impact on their trading operations as a result of the closure of the Hightown Road Bridge. (AQW 5932/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest Northern Ireland has not been contacted by any of its client companies to report a negative impact on their trading operations or made aware of any adverse affect caused by the closure of the Hightown Road Bridge

Euro-Friendly Businesses

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the action he is taking to encourage local businesses to become more Euro-friendly. (AQW 5953/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: A key objective of Invest NI is to help Northern Ireland companies compete successfully in international markets. To achieve this it encourages its clients to participate in a range of trade promotion and marketing activities. These activities, however, cover key markets worldwide and do not have a particular emphasis on the Euro-zone.

In recognition of the importance of European markets, Invest NI currently has offices located in Düsseldorf and Brussels. During the year ending March 2008, Invest NI organised and helped local companies participate in a range of exhibition stands

and visits to major trade shows in Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the Irish Republic

Tourist Board

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the criteria used by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in drawing up its register of outstanding visitor attractions for marketing purposes. (AQW 5956/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: NITB does not maintain a register of outstanding visitor attractions for marketing purposes. Each year the Northern Ireland Tourist Board undertakes a segmentation strategy to determine which customer groups will deliver the best return on investment for Northern Ireland tourism and the economy as a whole.

In addition, NITB delivers an annual research programme that identifies the types of experiences and products that the customer best enjoys. Having analysed the research and identified the best prospect segments, plans are developed for each segment.

Each plan outlines the development and communications' initiatives required to maximise return on investment. For example, an initiative targeting families from Republic of Ireland will include information on:

- Accommodation requirements
- Things to see and do that are suitable for children
- Family friendly restaurants etc

NITB Campaigns are developed to provide potential visitors with an idea of what there is to see and do on a targeted visit to Northern Ireland. Each campaign has a call to action encouraging visits to the website which provides up to the minute details of all visitor attractions and tourism products in Northern Ireland and also has links to a range of other websites.

In addition, on a monthly basis NITB disseminates targeted market intelligence on best prospect customers for private sector industry and the tourist information centre network identifying the type of holiday experience that the majority of Northern Ireland's visitors wish to experience. This provides the network with market intelligence to enable them to promote the most relevant visitor attractions to visitors when in Northern Ireland

Thompson Solutions

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the assistance his department has given to Thompson Solutions to establish a new facility at Moor Road, Kilkeel. (AQW 5979/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

J Thompson Solutions Ltd has received financial assistance from Invest NI in the past for their existing business but has not provided any assistance to Thompson Solutions to establish a new facility at Moor Road, Kilkeel. This company has held initial discussions with Invest NI but as yet no business plan has been received

Gas Prices

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the effect of gas prices on industry. (AQW 5983/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

International wholesale gas prices have been rising steadily during the past year. This has led to price increases being announced by gas companies in Great Britain, and more recently in Northern Ireland. For example, Phoenix Natural Gas announced a 28% price increase for domestic and smaller business customers on 24 April to take effect from 1 May 2008 for their licence area of Greater Belfast and Larne. Increasing energy prices are unwelcome, but the impact of price rises on industry will depend on the nature, terms and duration of contracts that individual companies have with their gas supplier.

Firmus energy, which is taking natural gas to 10 towns and cities outside Greater Belfast has a price cap in place until 1 January 2009, and industrial customers will be subject to the particular terms of their agreed contracts.

Economically Inactive

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide an estimate of the percentage of working age population that is currently economically inactive, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6056/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Economic inactivity rates for the working age population for each Parliamentary Constituency Area in Northern Ireland are shown in the table below. These estimates are sourced from the January to December 2006 Labour Force Survey.

ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATE, JANUARY - DECEMBER 2006

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Working Age ¹ Economic Inactivity rate (%)
Belfast East	17%
Belfast North	29%
Belfast South	25%

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Working Age ¹ Economic Inactivity rate (%)
Belfast West	51%
East Antrim	19%
East Londonderry	32%
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	37%
Foyle	33%
Lagan Valley	21%
Mid Ulster	32%
Newry & Armagh	27%
North Antrim	26%
North Down	27%
South Antrim	21%
South Down	28%
Strangford	22%
Upper Bann	29%
West Tyrone	31%
Northern Ireland	28%

¹ The term working age refers to females aged 16 to 59 and males aged 16 to 64.

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituency Areas are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution.

Source: Labour Force Survey, January – December 2006

Economically Inactive

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of economic inactivity, broken down by age and parliamentary constituency and identifying the number of students included in the figures, for each of the past five years. (AQW 6107/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates detailing Northern Ireland economic inactivity levels by age group in each of the last five years can be found in the table below. These estimates are not available at parliamentary constituency level, as the LFS sample size and design does not support the production of sufficiently reliable estimates by age and reason for economic inactivity at constituency level.

BREAKDOWN OF THE NI ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE POPULATION BY AGE GROUP AND REASON FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY, QUARTER 4 2003 – QUARTER 4 2007

Reference Period	Economic Status	Age Group						Total
		16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	45 - 64	65+	
Q4 2003	Econ Inactive	87,000	44,000	60,000	51,000	83,000	206,000	532,000
	Of which: Students	69,000	6,000 ¹	2,000 ¹	*	*	*	78,000
Q4 2004	Econ Inactive	90,000	36,000	48,000	57,000	86,000	209,000	527,000
	Of which: Students	72,000	3,000 ¹	1,000 ¹	*	*	*	76,000
Q4 2005	Econ Inactive	87,000	37,000	59,000	50,000	94,000	208,000	534,000
	Of which: Students	72,000	3,000 ¹	2,000 ¹	*	*	*	78,000
Q4 2006	Econ Inactive	98,000	34,000	46,000	55,000	90,000	214,000	538,000
	Of which: Students	82,000	3,000 ¹	1,000 ¹	*	*	*	87,000
Q4 2007	Econ Inactive	93,000	34,000	46,000	58,000	98,000	224,000	553,000
	Of which: Students	74,000	3,000 ¹	2,000 ¹	*	*	*	78,000

¹ Estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a higher than usual degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution.

* Estimates are not shown as they are potentially disclosive.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4 (October-December) of each year.

Unemployment Rates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail employment rates in each parliamentary constituency for the last five years.
(AQW 6109/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Labour Force Survey estimates of the working age employment rate in each parliamentary constituency, 2002 to 2006, are shown in the table below.

WORKING AGE¹ EMPLOYMENT RATE, 2002 - 2006

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Belfast East	75%	70%	72%	75%	81%
Belfast North	63%	61%	56%	59%	64%
Belfast South	70%	70%	64%	69%	71%
Belfast West	42%	48%	53%	48%	43%
East Antrim	76%	80%	78%	79%	79%
East Londonderry	68%	71%	64%	67%	62%
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	66%	67%	68%	68%	62%

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Foyle	56%	50%	54%	60%	61%
Lagan Valley	69%	70%	78%	80%	77%
Mid Ulster	68%	66%	68%	69%	67%
Newry & Armagh	61%	64%	67%	67%	68%
North Antrim	71%	72%	73%	74%	72%
North Down	75%	75%	73%	73%	71%
South Antrim	81%	81%	75%	71%	76%
South Down	70%	73%	70%	69%	69%
Strangford	70%	71%	68%	74%	74%
Upper Bann	67%	66%	72%	70%	67%
West Tyrone	62%	62%	59%	58%	65%
Northern Ireland	68%	68%	67%	69%	69%

¹ The term working age refers to females aged 16 to 59 and males aged 16 to 64.

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituency Areas are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution and, in particular, changes from year to year should not be used in isolation from the figures for a run of years.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Annual dataset 2002- 2006

Petrol Service Station Closures

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total number of independent petrol service stations that have closed in the last five years; and to give his assessment of this development. (AQW 6188/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department does not hold this information and, therefore, no assessment on independent petrol service station closure has been made.

Economically Active

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total number of people aged over 80 years who remain economically active, and to compare this to the figure ten years ago. (AQW 6200/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the main source of statistics on the total number of people who are economically active. However, the LFS is a sample survey and the sample size does not support the production of sufficiently reliable estimates for the age group requested

Staff Working from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of staff who have been authorised to work from home since May 2007. (AQW 6222/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: No staff of the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment have been authorised to work formally from home since May 2007. However, line managers may, in certain circumstances, permit an ad hoc working from home arrangement.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the targets his department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in his department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6262/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Invest NI

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which specific industry sectors are identified as having growth or new introduction potential for the Foyle constituency. (AQW 6333/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI works with those NI businesses in the manufacturing and tradeable services industry sectors that demonstrate the greatest potential for growth through increasing exports and improving productivity by becoming more internationally competitive.

With regards to the Foyle Parliamentary Constituency, Invest NI is working with a significant number of clients operating in the advanced manufacturing, lifesciences, ICT and services sectors and in the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2007 provided over £63 million of assistance to them to undertake growth projects. This assistance leveraged total investment of over £320 million.

In addition to enhancing the competitiveness of existing businesses, Invest NI also seeks to attract value-added foreign direct investment (FDI) in higher productivity sectors to Northern Ireland. The Foyle constituency, in common with the rest of Northern Ireland, has a number of key selling points which makes the region attractive to inward investors, particularly those operating in the ICT, Business Services and Financial Services Sectors. These key selling points include a highly educated workforce, competitive operating costs, advanced telecoms infrastructure, excellent university / business linkages and a pro-business environment. The attractiveness of the Foyle constituency is demonstrated by the fact that the region secured 13 FDI projects between 1st April 2002 and 31st March 2007 which promoted nearly 1,800 new jobs and over £239m of investment.

Invest NI works with Northern Ireland's public and private research bases to support the commercialisation of intellectual property. Specifically in relation to the Foyle constituency, the agency's major investment in the University of Ulster's Intelligent Systems Research Centre, based at the Magee Campus, has the potential to deliver exciting new developments and opportunities in the ICT sector

Electronic Distribution of Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6378/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Department does not monitor the extent to which correspondence both internal and external and the distribution of publications is carried out electronically. Significant use is made of e-mail and other electronic media. Some external correspondence and publications are produced in paper format to facilitate the reader.

ENVIRONMENT**Planning Approvals**

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of planning approvals that have been granted for apartments in (a) Newtownabbey; (b) Carrickfergus; and (c) Larne, in each of the past five years; and (ii) the number of proposed units in each application. (AQW 5584/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I regret that the Planning Service's current IT system does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested. Accurate figures for the years in question could only be provided through a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost.

Enforcement Cases

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the latest number of enforcement cases and the average length of time taken to process an enforcement case, broken down by divisional planning office. (AQW 5696/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The number of enforcement cases by divisional planning office is as follows

Division	Number of Outstanding Enforcement Cases
Ballymena	494
Belfast	785
Craigavon	1403
Downpatrick	1595
Headquarters	504
Londonderry	626
Omagh	464

The numbers refer to cases outstanding on the Departments live enforcement case list.

Data on the average length of time taken to process an enforcement case is not available because of the many possible outcomes of an individual case.

Where it is found, for example, that no breach of planning regulations has occurred the case may be closed within a few days. However, often a breach leads to the submission of an application that must be processed by Planning Service and if permission is refused this can lead to an appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission. Depending on the outcome of an appeal there may be further enforcement action and a possible court proceeding. This obviously takes a considerable length of time to conclude.

Planning Applications

Mr Butler asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the number of planning applications for (i) new houses; and (ii) new apartments, in the Dunmurry area. (AQW 5944/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Nine applications were received for new houses in Dunmurry in 2006/07. The Planning Service's current IT system does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide information on apartments. Accurate figures for the years in question could only be provided through a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost.

Data outside the 2006/07 period is not available at present due to the new statistical reporting system outlined in my letter to Members in December 2007.

Larne Marina

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the progress on the Larne Marina proposal. (AQW 5984/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My officials issued a Notice of Opinion to Refuse planning permission for the original Larne Marina planning application (F/1999/0465) on the 15 November 2007. The applicant subsequently requested a hearing with the Planning Appeals Commission. A date for this hearing has not been set. As a result of this the Department has not concluded its determination of this application.

In November 2007 the applicant submitted a second planning application for a Marina Development which was similar to the original application although the site location varied slightly. My officials have sought legal advice and are currently in discussion with the applicant's representatives regarding the processing of two applications which are substantially the same.

Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of planning applications referred to the Management Board in the last three years; and (ii) the number of cases in which the original planning opinion was reversed. (AQW 5995/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Below is a table of statistics for referrals received over the last 3 financial years:

Year	Referred by Council	Accepted as a Referral	Planning Opinion reversed
2005/06	174	17	3
2006/07	58	4	0
2007/08	43	1*	0
Total	275	22	3

* A further 21 applications are still under consideration and includes those that may not meet the referral criteria.

Foreign Road Users

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the measures she has planned to aid foreign road users in relation to road safety. (AQW 6022/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has a responsibility to ensure road safety messages are heard by all members of society, and work has been progressing in this area.

The current portfolio of successful television and radio advertisements, along with five new instructional TV edits, which will provide all drivers with a reminder of the rules of the road, have been translated into Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Mandarin. This information will be distributed to target groups through broadcast media and ethnic community groups around Northern Ireland.

The need for printed information in these languages has also been addressed and three leaflets have been produced:

- one providing information on the effects of alcohol on driving skills entitled 'Just One';
- a second, providing details of courses for drink drive offenders; and
- a third providing guidance on the legal requirement to use the correct car seat for your child.

Hard copies of leaflets will issue to targeted ethnic groups and downloadable versions will shortly be made available on the Road Safety website.

My Department is also examining the possibility of providing copies of the newly revised Highway Code to ethnic groups.

Vacant Industrial Buildings

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail her plans to relax restrictions on the development of listed vacant industrial buildings to allow viable redevelopment and avoid such buildings becoming derelict. (AQW 6027/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no plans to relax such restrictions. Officials in my Department liaise closely with developers to secure a suitable outcome for such buildings, in keeping with our existing policies as detailed in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6 - Planning, Archaeology and the Built heritage. There are many examples of this, such as the refurbishment of Conway Mill in Belfast or the Star Factory in Londonderry. In both cases this work has also helped the regeneration of an area.

Department Wages

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline her plans to increase planning department wages to stop the drift of staff towards private companies. (AQW 6033/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department is conscious of the significant numbers of experienced planners who have resigned in recent years, particularly during 2006/07, when the Planning Service lost an unprecedented 47 specialist planners.

However, 2007/08 has seen a significant slowdown in the level resignation of specialist planners with only 20 officers leaving. Whilst still a significant loss of experience, this represents a much more acceptable attrition rate of 4% and is less than the overall NICS staff turnover rate during 2006/07, of 5.3% (latest figure available).

Consequently, I am not convinced of the need at this time to introduce proposals for a retention/incentive scheme aimed specifically at specialist planners. However, my Department will continue to monitor the level of resignations on a regular basis and keep the need for a retention/incentive scheme under review.

I have however, already taken one step aimed at recognising the positive recognition specialist planners make to the work of the Planning Service. With effect from 1 January 2008, the Department has agreed to pay the professional fees of its specialist planners. This announcement has been very well received by specialist planners who have benefited.

Off-Sales

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any plans to review the current planning policy in relation to the location and number of 'off sales'. (AQW 6051/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Although there is planning policy for retail development there is no specific policy for 'off sales'. Planning permission is not required for a change of use from a shop to an 'off sales' as these fall within the same use class, Class A1, under the Planning (Use Classes) Order (NI) 2004 and such a change is therefore not considered development.

Leylandii Hedges

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether any public consultation was carried out on any proposed legislation in relation to high hedges and Leylandii between 2001 and 2007. (AQW 6058/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In 2005 my Department undertook a public consultation to assess the scale and geographical spread of problems with nuisance high hedges with a view to determining whether legislation was required. On the basis of the findings I made a commitment to introduce legislation to address this problem as soon as possible, starting with a policy consultation on the detailed operation of the legislation. However, the timing will be subject to consideration of the other competing priorities facing my Department.

Cars Registered

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of cars registered in Northern Ireland. (AQW 6063/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At 31 March 2008, there were 735,457 licensed cars in Northern Ireland and 47,374 unlicensed cars, which are the subject of a valid statutory off road notification.

Planning Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm if the Planning Service has a policy of refusing applications for windfarms located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. (AQW 6074/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Current policy for assessing windfarm proposals is contained in PSU 12 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland published in September 1993. Policy PSU 12 contains

a general presumption against wind farm development in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

My Department has recently consulted on draft Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy'. Draft PPS18 proposes the removal of the general presumption against windfarm development in AONBs. To ensure that landscape impacts are adequately considered, I am currently consulting on complementary guidance to PPS18 on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes to wind energy development.

Planning Applications

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action her department is taking to expedite the processing of the planning application submitted by Thompson Solutions to build a new factory at Moor Road, Kilkeel. (AQW 6076/08)

The Minister of the Environment: A valid planning application for this proposal was received on 31 March 2008. Immediately upon receipt this application was allocated to a case officer, given the economic implications and the level of political and media interest in the application. The senior planner for the area is processing the application personally. The application has already been site inspected and discussed internally; however, there are a number of outstanding consultation responses. My officials and Roads Service representatives met the applicant and agent on 22 April to discuss the proposal. Roads Service had indicated verbally that there may be issues regarding the proposed access, and this was discussed in some detail. The agents still need to submit a Transport Assessment which will deal with traffic and related issues. One objection has been received.

The site for the proposed factory is on zoned industrial land, therefore, the proposal is acceptable in principle. My officials will continue to deal with the application in a timely manner and work to resolve outstanding matters as quickly as possible. However, any delay by the agents in the submission of the Transport Assessment will impact on processing times.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the Tree Preservation Orders that currently apply to properties in Newcastle, Co Down. (AQW 6077/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are currently 7 TPOs in place in the Newcastle area with 2 further provisional TPOs in place that have yet to be confirmed. The details are as follows:

Address	Date of Provisional Order	Date Order confirmed
Slieve Donard Nursery, Newcastle	Not in effect	14/08/1976
Navan House, Tollymore Road, Newcastle	Not in effect	07/07/1993
St Mary's Girls School, Shanslieve Drive, Newcastle	Not in effect	01/08/2003
Strathern Manor (formerly Navan House), 10 Tollymore Road, Newcastle	15/04/2004	14/10/2004
98 Bryansford Road, Newcastle	21/03/2005	20/09/2005

Address	Date of Provisional Order	Date Order confirmed
Lands at Shimna House, Bryansford Road, Newcastle	26/07/2007	21/11/2007
Land at Myrtle Lodge, 88 Bryansford Road, Newcastle	18/09/2007	18/03/2008
9 Tollymore Road, Newcastle	30/01/2008	Still to be confirmed
Land at 13 Tullybrannigan Road, Newcastle	20/03/2008	Still to be confirmed

There is currently 1 application under consideration on land at Donard Park, Newcastle.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Tree Preservation Orders that were issued in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 6079/08)

The Minister of the Environment:

Year	TPOs issued
2003	14
2004	74
2005	97
2006	138
2007	99*

* 19 of these are provisional TPOs and have yet to be confirmed.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the sequence of events that led to a discharge from the Whiteabbey waste water facility into the Three Milewater river on the afternoon of 16 April 2008; (ii) to give her assessment of this incident and the impact on this river; and (iii)

to confirm that the alarm mechanism, which alerts the Northern Ireland Water service of a pollution incident, was operative at that time. (AQW 6082/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) received a report at 2:05am on the 16 April 2008 regarding a pollution incident on the Three Mile Water River. EHS staff were immediately tasked to attend and contacted Northern Ireland Water (NIW), at approximately 2:30 hrs, to report a discharge from Whiteabbey Pumping Station's emergency overflow. NIW staff discovered a problem with the pumps, which were quickly reset and began operating normally. The discharge to the river ceased by 4:00pm.

Screens on the emergency overflow at the pumping station prevented the discharge of significant quantities of sewage related debris into the river and as a result, the visual impact of the incident was low. EHS staff also assessed the environmental impact of the incident as low severity.

It was subsequently discovered that the problem had started on 14 April 2008. The alarm reporting system did not alert NIW field engineers to the problem and an investigation by NIW is underway. In the meantime, the overflow alarm system at the site has been further enhanced.

Sick Leave

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of staff at Rathkelter House, Downpatrick, who have taken sick leave in the last year; and (ii) whether the sick leave taken is short-term or long-term. (AQW 6089/08)

The Minister of the Environment: During the period 31 March 2007 - 1 April 2008, 60 of the 101 departmental staff working in Rathkelter House, Downpatrick have taken sick leave. Fifty-five staff have taken short term sick leave and 20 staff have taken long term sick leave.

Fast Food Applications

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for fast food and take-away cafés in the Carrickfergus area that have been (i) lodged; and (ii) granted, over the last three years. (AQW 6111/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret that the Planning Service does not identify fast food and take away cafes separately from shops and is therefore unable to provide the information required without carrying out a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost.

Departmental Spending

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount of money her department has spent on (i) equality impact assessments; and (ii) consultations, over the last three years. (AQW 6114/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The table below sets out the total cost of consultations (which include EQIA costs) in my Department in each of the last three years. As the EQIA's form part of the actual consultation process separate costs cannot be identified for them except at disproportionate cost. The significant drop in expenditure between 2006-07 and 2007-08 is due to reducing costs in respect of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan as well as certain other area development plans being subject to judicial reviews.

Department - DOE	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Consultation Costs	£573,308	£432,341	£114,663

Driving Licences

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of 'R' drivers with six or more penalty points whose licences have been revoked within three years of having passed the practical driving test. (AQW 6125/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Since 14 December 1998, with the introduction of the New Drivers Order, the number of drivers whose licences have been revoked is as follows (only those for category B, motorcar, with a Test Pass Date since 01/01/1999 have been included):

Year	Total Drivers Category B pass	Total Revoked within 12 months	Total Revoked 12- 24 months	Total Disq within 25 - 36 months	Total Number still with Licence
1999	21443	155	129	135	21064
2000	19355	142	116	159	18978
2001	18004	139	124	155	17626
2002	18509	125	118	184	18112
2003	20781	143	82	193	20383
2004	18594	132	107	185	18210
2005	24993	185	105	164	24539
2006	26998	180	54	4	26760
2007	24333 *	33	0	0	24300

* In considering the 2007 figures it should be noted that for many drivers it will be less than 12 months since they passed their test, only a small percentage will be over 12 months and none will be over 25 months.

Voltage Power Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning restrictions in place for building homes in the vicinity of high voltage power lines. (AQW 6131/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At present there is no guidance or policy in Northern Ireland that places restrictions on building homes in close proximity to high voltage power lines.

All applications are assessed on their individual merits in accordance with all relevant plans, policies and material considerations. As with all planning applications, the proposal will also be assessed within the context of the surrounding environment. Normal development control considerations, such as those relating to the proximity of proposed housing units to overhead lines, will form part of this assessment.

Planning Applications

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if she will issue, as a matter of urgency, the Green Paper for Planning Application X/2007/0964/F which has been approved. (AQW 6134/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department is currently dealing with a representation received following the council meeting and does not propose to issue the decision notice until the issues raised are satisfactorily concluded.

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff in her department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6143/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Within the Department, since 8 May 2007, a total of:

- 101 staff have received official warnings; and
- 13 staff have faced disciplinary procedures.

Compost Collection Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of local councils who have a compost collection service, either directly or indirectly. (AQW 6162/08)

The Minister of the Environment: All local councils offer green waste collection at their civic amenity sites. 18 councils collect green waste at the kerbside, while 8

(Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Derry, Fermanagh, Limavady, Moyle and Strabane) do not.

Recycling Targets

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the targets for recycling for 2007/2008, broken down by each local council. (AQW 6163/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department did not set targets for recycling for 2007/8. The NI Waste Management Strategy 2006-2020 sets targets for recycling and composting of household waste at 35% by 2010, 40% by 2015 and 45% by 2020. The targets for non-municipal wastes require that 60% of Commercial & Industrial waste be recycled, and 75% of Construction, Demolition & Excavation waste be recycled or reused by 2020.

These targets are non statutory and are set for Northern Ireland as a whole. Individual District Councils may set annual targets but these are not held centrally by the Department.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Tree Preservation Orders granted in each of the last three years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6185/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Statistics for the number of TPOs issued in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency, are unavailable as they are not recorded in that format, however, below is a table detailing breakdown by District Council area:

Year	2005	2006	2007	Total
Council Area	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	
Antrim	8	7	9 (2 to be confirmed)	24
Ards	2	3	5 (3 to be confirmed)	10
Year	2005	2006	2007	Total
Council Area	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	
Armagh	2	3	0	5
Ballymena	6	10	8 (1 to be confirmed)	24
Ballymoney	2	0	0	2
Banbridge	4	21	2(1 to be confirmed)	27

Year	2005	2006	2007	Total
Council Area	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	No of TPOs	
Belfast	13	10	15 (2 to be confirmed)	38
Carrickfergus	0	2	0	2
Castlereagh	3	3	2	8
Coleraine	15	2	4	21
Cookstown	3	1	0	4
Craigavon	2	2	3	7
Derry	3	3	2	8
Down	3	2	8 (1 to be confirmed)	13
Dungannon	0	4	3 (1 to be confirmed)	7
Fermanagh	0	3	2 (1 to be confirmed)	5
Larne	1	5	0	6
Limavady	5	1	0	6
Lisburn	7	6	9 (2 to be confirmed)	22
Magherafelt	1	2	5 (2 to be confirmed)	8
Moyle	3	1	0	4
Newry & Mourne	4	26	3	33
Newtownabbey	4	8	3	15
North Down	5	6	10 (1 to be confirmed)	21
Omagh	0	6	2	8
Strabane	1	1	4 (2 to be confirmed)	6
Total	97	138	99 (19 to be confirmed)	334

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the land sold by her department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6247/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has sold two parcels of ground in the North Down constituency since 2002: 70 square meters and 0.46 acres, both on the edge of Crawfordsburn Country Park.

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, in addition to her department's mainstream responsibilities, the resources that have been allocated to (i) Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; and (ii) the Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Area, in each of the last 2 years. (AQW 6284/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In addition to my department's mainstream responsibilities, no further resources were allocated to (i) Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; or (ii) the Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Area, in each of the last 2 years.

District Councils

Mr Butler asked the Minister of the Environment to detail her plans to introduce within district councils (i) pilot power-sharing; and (ii) proportionality proposals. (AQW 6295/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I indicated in my statement to the House on 31 March, the development and testing of new governance models, with appropriate checks and balances, will be taken forward by the Strategic Leadership Board as an urgent and integral part of the implementation of the decisions on the future shape of local government.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff in her department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6306/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There is no formal home working policy within the NICS or the Department of the Environment. However, in practice there can be short term local arrangements in specific circumstances. There are no central figures retained.

Planning Law

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what plans her department has to introduce legislation to revise planning law in conjunction with the stated intention of the Minister for Social Development to introduce a 'developer contribution' to alleviate social housing need. (AQO 3132/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have agreed with the Minister for Social Development that I will cooperate with her to consider policy options for the

introduction for developer contributions after revised draft PPS 14 has issued for consultation.

I will consider the need for legislative change as part of that process.

Bin Collection

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of local councils that have signed up to bi-weekly bin collection. (AQO 3085/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department does not have regulatory control over bin collections and therefore does not hold this information.

District Councils have powers under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 to determine a timetable for bin collection that best enables them to meet recycling and landfill targets under the EU Waste Framework Directive.

Landfill Sites

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to review safety at landfill sites; and what action she is taking to deal with the growing number of illegal landfill sites. (AQO 3145/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has no legislative powers to review safety at landfill sites. Responsibility for enforcing health and safety at these sites rests with the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. HSENI inspects and carries out investigations of serious incidents at landfill sites such as the one that occurred recently at a landfill site in County Fermanagh.

My Department takes the waste crime associated with illegal landfill sites very seriously. EHS has achieved considerable progress to date in targeting environmental criminals and has been equally successful in 'spreading the message', through the courts and the media, that criminals will not benefit from the proceeds of illegal activity.

In the last five years, EHS has overseen almost 300 successful prosecutions against illegal waste offenders, charges which have generated fines of £670,615. In addition, 6 custodial sentences have been imposed, ranging from 2 to 12 months.

In the last year, the number of reported incidents of illegal dumping – 1,184 – dropped by almost 17% compared with the previous financial year. In the

same period, 93 cases were referred to the Public Prosecution Service, with 63 successful convictions in the courts.

EHS is also moving towards a more intelligence-led strategy, working with the Assets Recovery Agency/ Serious Organised Crime Agency and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to both develop officials' financial and investigative skills and to refer cases for confiscation hearings. I was very pleased to see EHS become the first UK agency to obtain a criminal confiscation for environmental offences, in November 2007. Since then, four further confiscation orders have been achieved, totalling £833,120.

Bus Safety

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of recent problems with bus safety, what assessment she has made of bus safety measures in other developed countries. (AQO 3094/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In developing new measures aimed at increasing the safety of children travelling to and from school my Department continues to research and learn from what works in other countries, in other parts of the UK, in the Republic of Ireland, and farther afield – particularly in the United States, Canada and Australasia.

Planning Applications

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment if procedures are in place to ensure that planning applications which will have a significant impact on the economy are prioritised. (AQO 3187/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Programme for Government refers to a six month target being applied to large scale planning proposals. These are proposals which are considered to have significant economic or social implications for the whole or a substantial part of Northern Ireland. They will be handled by the Strategic Projects Division of Planning Service and the six month target is now being applied provided there have been pre-application discussions with an agreed outcome.

Within the Strategic Projects Division I have recently agreed to the creation of two multi-disciplinary teams – teams which are comprised of planning staff as well as professionals from other relevant disciplines – to help to further enhance the efficiency of the service that is provided.

I am hopeful these multi-disciplinary teams will be in place within the next couple of months.

Where the potential economic significance of a development proposal is not considered to extend to the whole or a significant part of Northern Ireland, then it is likely that the planning application in question will be handled by the local Divisional Planning Office as opposed to the Strategic Projects Division. Nonetheless, priority will still be given to the application in terms of the staff resources that are applied to its processing. Guidance on prioritisation of applications was issued to all Divisional Planning Offices in July 2006.

My officials have also published guidance for prospective developers/applicants on pre-application discussions. This will assist in the development of procedures for meaningful pre-application engagement between the Planning Service, our key consultees – some of whom will be represented in our multi-disciplinary teams – and applicants. As part of the pre-application discussions, an indicative timescale for processing the application will be provided. Clearly, if this is to be a success in terms of speeding up the process there will be obligations on everyone involved in the planning process, including agents, through a mutual commitment to improve the quality of applications and maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory process quickly.

Glass Bottles

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment to detail her plans to establish a refundable deposit system on all glass bottles, especially for alcoholic drink. (AQO 3071/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I do not have any plans to establish a refundable deposit system on all glass bottles.

Planning Applications

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what action she is taking to ensure that planning applications are not unduly delayed by the Environment and Heritage Service. (AQO 3210/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Response times to planning applications is a key priority both for me and for the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). One of the objectives I set for the Agency last year was to provide quality and timely responses to planning consultations; the key target for the year was to respond to 75% of consultations within 30 working days of receipt. I regret that this target was not met, as only 69% of consultations were returned within 30 days.

I have asked EHS to re-double its efforts to improve this record. This is a very resource intensive area of work for the Agency with almost 700 consultations received on average each month; indeed, in January alone, 915 consultations were received. It is always possible that a development in a planning application may have an adverse impact on sites which are under statutory protection; it is often necessary therefore to carry out site visits to assess properly that impact. This is very time consuming and there are no shortcuts, if we want to protect our environment. However, I also recognise that we need to improve our performance in this area if we are to maintain an efficient and effective planning system.

EHS has changed its procedures where appropriate; improved and increased its staff training; and sought to strengthen its working arrangements with the Planning Service at all levels.

I have also set aside an additional £500k to enable EHS to recruit more staff dedicated to this area of work. To reflect that investment I have increased the key target for response times from 75% in the current year to 90% by 2010.

Driver Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the percentage of Driver Vehicle Testing Agency centres that are meeting their targets for vehicle testing times. (AQO 3080/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The target for the 2007/08 year was an average waiting time of 21 days. 93% of centres achieved this target. The target for 2008/09 has been revised to 85% of vehicle tests appointed within 21 days or on a later date requested by the customer. Reports on 2008/09 performance will be available on a monthly basis throughout the year.

Sea Pollution

Mr Ford asked the Minister of the Environment to report on the reduction levels in sea pollution that her department hopes to achieve. (AQO 3178/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) aims to reduce, by 2015, the levels of pollution in rivers, estuaries and coastal waters to achieve 'good status', or higher, under the terms of the EC Water Framework Directive. There is already evidence that pollution levels are reducing in coastal waters, particularly where new Waste Water Treatment Works have been installed. EHS also has a target to achieve, by 2016, 90% compliance with consents issued under the Water

(Northern Ireland) Order 1999. The compliance figure for 2006 was 85%.

Wind Farms

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for wind farms currently awaiting decisions. (AQO 3130/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are currently 50 applications under consideration for wind farms.

Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm when the Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry will be published. (AQO 3176/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I can confirm that the Department has now received the PAC report on the Ards and Down Area Plan Public Inquiry. Planning Service is currently considering the implications of the report in consultation with key consultees and will shortly provide guidance on a possible date for adoption. This depends on the nature of the PAC recommendations on each objection. We cannot provide a firm indication on timescales at this stage but our intention is to complete the adoption stage as quickly as possible.

The PAC report can only be made available by the Department when it completes the adoption process and publishes the adopted plan, with or without modifications and its content is confidential until that time.

Plastic Bags

Mrs Long asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to encourage shops to reduce the number of plastic bags used. (AQO 3175/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department continues to support voluntary initiatives aimed at reducing carrier bag usage (plastic bags and paper bags) such as the current UK-wide agreement between Government, the Waste Resources Action Programme and retailers which aims to reduce the overall environmental impact of all carrier bags by 25% by the end of 2008. Retailers are seeking to achieve this reduction by:

- encouraging customers to significantly reduce the number of carrier bags they use;
- reducing the impact of each carrier bag e.g. by using less material or incorporating recycled content; and

- enabling the recycling of more carrier bags where appropriate.

I am encouraged by the various initiatives brought forward by major supermarket chains to reduce usage of carrier bags.

In last month's budget speech the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that legislation would be introduced to impose a charge on single-use carrier bags if we have not seen sufficient progress on a voluntary basis. This is obviously a very significant development and my officials are currently liaising with colleagues in GB to obtain more detailed information on initial legislative proposals and we are also considering any possible implications for Northern Ireland.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Claims of Discrimination

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total number of claims of discrimination based on each of the Section 75 categories which were brought by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and settled (a) in court; and (b) out of court, in each of the last five years; and (ii) the total amount of compensation paid in each category. (AQW 5419/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 serves as a vehicle for mainstreaming equality of opportunity considerations into public authorities' policies and practices. The focus is on groups of people and whether policy and practice is sensitive to differences in needs and experiences as well as opportunities for access to employment, progression etc. Anti-discrimination legislation gives rights to individuals which they may choose to exercise at a tribunal or a court of law.

Information has therefore been provided on those Section 75 categories which are covered by anti-discrimination legislation ie, complaints of discrimination on the grounds of equal pay, sex (including gender re-assignment) disability, race, religious belief and or political opinion, sexual orientation and age.

The information is set out in the attached tables and covers staff working in the 11 Northern Ireland Departments and their executive agencies. In many cases where a claim was settled out of court the terms of the settlement are confidential. In order to ensure this is maintained information on the amount of compensation paid has been withheld where there are 5 cases or less.

EQUAL PAY

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007				
2006			1	
2005			1	
2004				
2003				

SEX DISCRIMINATION

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007			1	
2006			3	
2005			1	
2004			3	
2003			4	

GENDER REASSIGNMENT

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007				
2006				
2005				
2004				
2003				

DISABILITY

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007			5	
2006			3	
2005			3	
2004			6	£27,000
2003	3	£33,564.73	1	

RACE

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007				
2006				
2005				
2004				
2003				

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND/OR POLITICAL OPINION

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007			1	
2006				
2005			3	
2004			3	
2003			5	

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007				
2006				
2005				
2004				
2003				

AGE

	Settled in court		Settled out of court	
	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid	Total no. of cases	Amount of compensation paid
2007				
2006				
2005				
2004				
2003				

Non-Domestic Ratepayers

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage of non-domestic ratepayers broken down by (a) parliamentary constituency; and (b) district council area, that benefit from industrial de-rating. (AQW 5846/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Industrial derating is awarded to non-domestic property that meets the qualifying criteria. The attached table shows –

- the number of non-domestic properties in each district council area;
- the number of industrial derated properties in each district council area, and;
- the industrial derated properties as a percentage of the non-domestic properties.

The rating system does not hold this information by parliamentary constituency.

District Council	Number Of Non-Domestic Properties	Number Of Industrial Derated Properties	%
Antrim	1,868	155	8.3
Ards	2,599	193	7.43
Armagh	2,501	186	7.44
Ballymena	2,516	160	6.36
Ballymoney	1,110	75	6.76
Banbridge	1,772	116	6.55
Belfast	16,121	604	3.75
Carrickfergus	1,053	81	7.69
Castlereagh	1,473	139	9.44
Coleraine	2,660	140	5.26
Cookstown	1,639	161	9.82
Craigavon	3,442	294	8.54
Down	2,656	134	5.05
Dungannon and South Tyrone	2,683	291	10.85
Fermanagh	3,148	193	6.13
Larne	1,240	63	5.08
Limavady	1,162	72	6.2
Lisburn	3,598	354	9.84
Derry	3,807	220	5.78
Magherafelt	1,855	186	10.03
Moyle	830	19	2.29

District Council	Number Of Non-Domestic Properties	Number Of Industrial Derated Properties	%
Newry and Mourne	3,984	323	8.11
Newtownabbey	2,444	204	8.35
North Down	2,435	159	6.53
Omagh	2,277	145	6.37
Strabane	1,517	80	5.27
Total	72,390	4,747	

Industrial De-rating

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of businesses in each (a) parliamentary constituency; and (b) district council area, that benefit from industrial derating. (AQW 5848/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Industrial de-rating is awarded to non-domestic property that meets the appropriate criteria. The attached table shows details of the number of non-domestic properties in each district council area, and the number of industrial derated properties in each district council area.

The rating system does not hold this information by parliamentary constituency.

District Council	Number Of Non-Domestic Properties	Number Of Industrial Derated Properties
Antrim	1,868	155
Ards	2,599	193
Armagh	2,501	186
Ballymena	2,516	160
Ballymoney	1,110	75
Banbridge	,772	116
Belfast	16,121	604
Carrickfergus	1,053	81
Castlereagh	1,473	139
Coleraine	2,660	140
Cookstown	1,639	161
Craigavon	3,442	294
Down	2,656	134
Dungannon and South Tyrone	2,683	291
Fermanagh	3,148	193

District Council	Number Of Non-Domestic Properties	Number Of Industrial Derated Properties
Larne	1,240	63
Limavady	1,162	72
Lisburn	3,598	354
Derry	3,807	220
Magherafelt	1,855	186
Moyle	830	19
Newry and Mourne	3,984	323
Newtownabbey	2,444	204
North Down	2,435	159
Omagh	2,277	145
Strabane	1,517	80
Total	72,390	4,747

Industrial De-rating

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the qualifying criteria for a business to benefit from industrial derating. (AQW 5849/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: To benefit from industrial derating, a property must be shown in the Valuation List as an industrial hereditament under the provisions of Article 43 of The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 and used as a mine, a quarry or a factory. A property qualifies as a factory if it is a place where manual labour is employed for the purpose of gain in making, altering, repairing or adapting an article for sale. There are exclusions, for example, if the property is mainly used as a private dwelling, a shop, for storage or for other non factory purposes. This is a complex area of rating law and each case needs to be decided on its merits against a background of these general principles, statute and case law.

Non-Domestic Ratepayers

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of businesses from the Glengormley/Mallusk area that have applied for the hardship relief fund for non-domestic ratepayers, as a result of the impact on their trading operations of the closure of the Hightown Road Bridge. (AQW 5930/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land and Property Services administer the Hardship Relief scheme.

One application is currently being processed in relation to the closure of the Hightown road bridge.

Sick Leave

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm whether a permanent employee of the Civil Service who has been off work on sick leave, due to stress caused by work, is entitled to be transferred to a different position of a similar grade on return to work. (AQW 6112/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A permanent employee who has been off work on sick leave, due to work-related stress, can be considered for a transfer to another post, in their existing grade.

Overhead Power Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reduced rates available to householders whose properties are located in the vicinity of high voltage overhead power lines. (AQW 6132/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Householders living in the vicinity of high voltage power lines will be entitled to a reduction in their rates if the capital value of their house is adversely affected because of the proximity of these lines. An application can be made to the District Valuer at any time to have the capital value reviewed. Each case is considered on its merits.

Advice Centre

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he is satisfied that the rates-exempt advice centre at 142a Main Street, Bushmills (i) has charitable status; and (ii) is a cross-community operation with no party political ties. (AQW 6189/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The rates exempt status in the Valuation List is based on the evidence provided to the District Valuer (Land and Property Services) in 1998.

The District Valuer is reviewing the current situation; the premises have recently been inspected and discussions have taken place with the occupiers. I am advised that the District Valuer's decision is imminent.

Staff Working from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff who have

been authorised to work from home since May 2007. (AQW 6220/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is no Departmental Homeworking Policy at present and the information requested is not held centrally. Departmental Personnel Division have not received any formal requests for homeworking since May 2007 and would not necessarily know if homeworking on an ad hoc basis had been granted, for whatever reason, as it is normally approved at a local level.

Land Disposals

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the effect of the current drop in property values and the credit crunch on the land disposals contained with this year's Budget. (AQO 3127/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although there has been a softening of the property market it is nevertheless essential that NI departments secure the planned level of capital receipts set out in the Budget document in order that capital investment projects such as the Downe Hospital in Downpatrick, the Westlink upgrade, and the new build social housing programme can be taken forward as planned this year.

Although there are pressures in the residential market in particular, I am confident that departments, working with the support of the Capital Assets Realisation Team, will be able to deliver the planned level of capital receipts.

It is also worth noting that any drop in property values also means that the cost of public sector capital projects, and in particular the land element, should also reduce.

Financial Services Industry

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of recent developments in the local financial services industry. (AQO 3111/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: On the 14th April I met with Finance Minister Cowan to discuss cooperation on financial services. He has now publicly announced that the Irish Government has indicated to the regulatory authority that it would be favourably disposed to financial institutions relocating some functions to Northern Ireland.

This significant announcement now allows finance companies currently located in the Republic of Ireland to transfer middle and back office services to Northern Ireland in order to alleviate skills shortages.

These are valuable, well-rewarded jobs in a key sector that Northern Ireland needs to encourage. This is an important step in developing our financial services sector.

Varney II Report

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an update on the Varney II Report. (AQO 3167/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I met recently with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Sir David Varney to review progress on this second review. I expect the report to be finalised and published within the next week.

Sir David and his team have undertaken an extensive analysis of the Northern Ireland economy. They have highlighted how there exists significant potential to develop our economy further. The report will also identify policy areas that need to be reassessed and structured better to assist economic growth.

There will not however be a single 'silver bullet' recommendation in this second Varney Study. The report will be a strategic roadmap for economic development.

Executive's Review of Rating

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the further work being carried out following the outcome of the Executive's review of rating. (AQO 3115/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There has been significant progress in advancing the decisions arising from the Executive's Review of Rating and I am delivering on my commitment to implement change.

Measures to provide further help to pensioners have already been introduced. This includes a 20% reduction in rates for those aged 70 and over living alone, as well as an increase in the savings limit for rate relief purposes.

In addition, research and consultation is underway to progress other key policy changes.

I am currently consulting on reducing the maximum capital value from £500 000 to £400 000. Further consultation papers will issue over the coming months on the detail of other new policies that I agreed to implement, including:

- the rating of empty homes;
- a deferment scheme for pensioners;
- an energy efficiency rate rebate; and

- enhanced data-sharing powers.

I have also received a study from Age Concern and Help the Aged, which my Department commissioned, into ways in which the take up of reliefs could be improved. I will be examining their recommendations over the coming weeks.

There is to be an evaluation of the rate relief scheme for those in full-time education and training and my Department is in the process of engaging consultants to undertake this important work.

Examination of the case for the rating of formerly developed land derelict commercial buildings is underway and I will involve other Departments in this work very shortly.

Finally, I have already taken the necessary steps to peg industrial derating at 30%.

I believe this package of measures, together with the decision to freeze the regional rate, will deliver a better rating system for us all and one that gains greater acceptance from the ratepaying public and the business sector.

Distribution of Jobs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he is taking to ensure that the distribution of jobs, following the new arrangements arising from the Review of Public Administration, is undertaken in a balanced and equitable manner, given that some employees are not able to travel long distances to work. (AQO 3166/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: An independent Review of policy on the location of public sector jobs is currently underway. The Review, chaired by Professor Sir George Bain, was approved by the Executive before Christmas and is due to report by the summer. The aim of the Review is to recommend a distribution of public sector jobs that best enhances the sustainable social and economic development of Northern Ireland. In doing so I would fully expect Professor Bain to look at the recent announcements on the RPA and the potential implications for public sector employment.

However, following Executive approval, a framework to underpin decision making relating to the RPA was published last autumn. It sets out very clearly the principles and methodology to be followed when coming to decisions on location of RPA bodies. The framework contains five guiding principles one of which is ensuring that staff interests such as mobility, travel to work and work life balance are taken into account. Departments are required to use the framework when making decisions on the RPA and apply it to the decision making process.

Peace III Expenditure

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an update on the co-ordination of Peace III expenditure with other public expenditure. (AQO 3170/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Budget provision for PEACE III expenditure is shown in the Executive's budget alongside all other public expenditure so that such relationships are visible to all when approving the budget. Furthermore all applications for PEACE III funding are assessed using the selection criteria agreed last year by the Northern Ireland Executive. Under these criteria, applicants must show how their proposed project links with or complements government strategies or initiatives. In implementing the PEACE III Programme, the Special EU Programmes Body meets regularly with Government Departments and relevant statutory bodies such as the Victims' Commissioners and the Community Relations Council. This ensures that Programme actions are coordinated with wider publicly funded strategy.

Rates Debt

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total rates debt at 31 March 2008 and how it compares with the figure of the previous year. (AQO 3120/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total rates debt at the 31st March 2008 was £124.2m. This compares to £88.3m rates debt at the previous financial year end. The increase in debt is £35.9m or 40.7%.

Cross-Border Mobility

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he is taking to address obstacles to cross-border mobility that fall within the remit of his department. (AQO 3164/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Public sector pensions and banking are two areas which fall within my remit.

At the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in Institutional format in October 2007, Ministers agreed that the NSMC Joint Secretariat should convene two working groups of officials from relevant departments, including the two finance departments, to explore options for going forward on the cross-border transfer of pensions rights, to examine cross-border banking issues, including transaction charges and to report back to a future NSMC meeting.

Officials from my department are members of both working groups which are currently evaluating the extent and impact of the pensions and banking issues.

A report will be brought to a future meeting of the NSMC.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the work of the Performance & Efficiency Delivery Unit. (AQO 3078/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The work of PEDU will assist the Executive, Ministers and Departments in ensuring that the commitments and targets set out in the Programme for Government are realised. Thus the focus of PEDU will be on the Executive's priorities and, where funding is not translating into the desired outcomes, PEDU will be used as a tool by the Executive to take direct action to identify problems and implement solutions.

As I previously announced, the Minister of the Environment and I have agreed that PEDU might usefully be used to improve our performance in the planning process – a key facilitator of the Executive's top priority of growing the economy.

I also believe that PEDU can make a useful contribution within my own Department. The new Land & Property Services (LPS) is facing a number of challenges, not least significant rate arrears, and I am keen that PEDU work with LPS to ensure that a robust plan is in place to delivery measurable improvements in their performance.

Rate Relief

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on the level of take-up of rate relief for 2008/09 compared to the level in 2007/08. (AQO 3165/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: New claims for Rate Relief arise when entitlement to Housing Benefit is assessed and the award of benefit leaves an outstanding rate balance owing. Land and Property Services experiences a substantial increase in new claims for Housing Benefit and Rate Relief following the issue of annual rate bills.

In the six working days following the issue of rate bills for 2007/08, some 215 claim forms for Housing Benefit and Rate Relief were received. In the six working days since rates bills issued for 2008/09, 370 claim forms for Housing Benefit and Rate Relief have been received. This is an increase of 72% on last

year. No new claims for Rate Relief have as yet been assessed for 2008/09.

Interreg IV Funding

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the role of the community and voluntary sector in the implementation of Interreg IV funding. (AQO 3136/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Implementing the INTERREG IVA Cross Border Programme is the role of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). Voluntary and community sector organisations are encouraged to apply for INTERREG IVA funding. Any project proposals they put forward will be assessed on the basis of the selection procedures agreed by the Executive at the end of last year.

Local Produce

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his position in relation to the procurement of local produce. (AQO 3103/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: All procurements are subject to the EU Treaty which requires freedom of movement, transparency and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality. Public sector buyers therefore cannot restrict their purchases to specific locations or suppliers.

However, Central Procurement Directorate is working on bringing forward new public procurement guidance for procurers, allowing them to develop specifications which will deliver fresh, seasonal produce and for which local producers can compete.

Ministerial Directions

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of Ministerial Directions that have been received by his department since 8 May 2007. (AQO 3126/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There was one Ministerial Direction issued during the period. This related to a decision by the DARD Minister on 28 February 2008 in relation to suspending imports of certain animals susceptible to Bluetongue disease.

Departmental Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the funding opportunities available

for organisations offering support or advocacy services on behalf of children, young people and families who do not fit the remit or priorities of a department which has been allocated 'ring-fenced funding' for children. (AQO 3076/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of the 2007 Budget process the Executive agreed that projects previously supported by Central Funds should be mainstreamed into departmental budgets. Therefore departments did not receive specific ring-fenced funding allocations for children's services, which allowed non ring-fenced allocations to be greater than they otherwise would have been.

In terms of the specific services in question, the ambits of a number Northern Ireland departments, as set out in the Main Estimates and Spring Supplementary Estimates, provide the legal authority, regardless of whether a Budget allocation is ring-fenced or not, to fund a broad range of public services including support for advocacy services on behalf of children, young people and families.

It is a matter for the respective departments to determine whether funding should be provided for specific support and advocacy projects or programmes in light of competing priorities and the overall level of resources available.

Budget Spending Plans

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if it has considered a revision of all Executive programmes in light of recent increases in fuel prices. (AQO 3101/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: On 29 January 2008 the Assembly approved the programme of expenditure proposals for 2008-09 to 2010-11 as set out in the Budget document, laid before the Assembly on 22 January 2008.

These spending plans reflected the position at that time and will be subject to review as more up to date information becomes available and any pressures emerge.

Through the in-year monitoring process departments will be able to put forward proposals to manage emerging pressures from within their existing resources. They will also have the opportunity to submit bids to my department for additional resources if they are unable to manage the pressure within their overall budget allocation.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

General Practitioner Surgery

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to encourage a general practitioner surgery to open on the Donegal Road in south Belfast. (AQW 5700/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): The Eastern Health and Social Services Board have advised that there is currently a GP practice at 15a Donegall Road, a further 5 practices located within half a mile of the Donegall Road and 15 practices within 1 mile. All offer home visits where a patient's condition is such that they cannot attend the surgery. GP practices are independent businesses, and it is a matter for the GPs concerned where they establish. However, Health and Social Services Boards monitor GP accessibility and will work to encourage local GPs to establish a presence where accessibility is insufficient.

Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that patients receiving treatment for Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease will not be disadvantaged as a result of any financial constraints. (AQW 5776/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The allocation of funding for specialist hospital drugs and therapies is a matter for Health and Social Services Boards, as commissioners of services. The 2008-2011 budget settlement includes additional funding for hospital and specialist drugs of £39 million by 2010/11, which will allow the health service to improve access to specialist therapies for a range of conditions, including sight preserving treatments for people affected by wet age-related macular degeneration consistent with the emerging evidence base for the treatment of this condition.

The health service currently provides specialist argon laser and photodynamic therapy for patients with wet age-related macular degeneration who are clinically suitable for these treatments. Boards are also currently providing funding for treatment with anti-VEGF drugs for patients with the greatest clinical priority.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average

length of time from X-rays being taken until they are made available to out-patients at Daisy Hill hospital. (AQW 5777/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average length of time between an x-ray being taken and made available to out-patients at Daisy Hill Hospital is 12.3 days. However, urgent referrals are examined and reported on the same day.

I recently announced that all Trusts had met the target set last year that no patients should wait longer than 13 weeks for any diagnostic test, including x-rays. New targets have now been set that by March 2009, patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for diagnostic tests. I have also set a new diagnostic reporting time target that by March 2009 all urgent diagnostic tests are reported on within two days of the tests being undertaken, and 75% of all routine tests reported on within two weeks, and all within four weeks.

Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his policy in relation to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommendations on the treatment for Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease. (AQW 5778/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently appraising ranibizumab (Lucentis) and pegaptanib (Macugen) for the treatment of wet age related macular degeneration (wet AMD), and issued its Final Appraisal Determination on the 1st April 2008. Subject to appeals against this determination, final guidance is expected to be published in June 2008.

My Department has established a link with NICE whereby all guidance published by the Institute from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. The guidance on Lucentis and Macugen will be considered under these arrangements when NICE publishes its final guidance in June 2008.

Rural Proofing

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to ensure that all departmental policies are rural-proofed. (AQW 5799/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department recognises that the needs of people and communities in rural areas may vary from those in urban settings and implements the

current guidance provided in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's Policy Toolkit on Rural Screening and Impact Assessment. Where our screening and impact assessment processes identify an impact on rural communities, relevant questions are included in public consultation documents. My Department will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement any future changes to the rural proofing of policies.

Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people aged (i) 0-18 years; (ii) 18-30 years; (iii) 30-50 years; and (iv) over 50 years, who have attended the Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit in each of the last three years. (AQW 5801/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people aged (i) 0-18 years; (ii) >18-30 years; (iii) >30-50 years; and (iv) over 50 years, who have attended the Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, in each of the last three years, is detailed in the table below.

Year	0-18 Years	>18-30 Years	>30-50 Years	Over 50 Years	Total Attendances
2004/05	2,186	1,744	2,699	2,715	9,344
2005/06	2,452	1,916	2,882	2,774	10,024
2006/07	2,647	1,880	2,807	2,868	10,202

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

High Dependency Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the date of the latest hygiene audit of the High Dependency Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 5811/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The most recent Environmental Cleanliness audit of the High Dependency Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital was carried out on Tuesday 15 April 2008.

High Dependency Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if complaints were received by the Royal Victoria Hospital High Dependency Unit from members of the

public, in relation to the unsatisfactory state of the men's toilets. (AQW 5812/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast HSC Trust has informed me that no complaints have been received from members of the public in the last 4 months in relation to the state of the men's toilets in the Royal Victoria High Dependency Unit.

High Dependency Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if a cleaning chart was displayed in the men's toilets in the Royal Victoria Hospital High Dependency Unit, over the last 2 weeks. (AQW 5814/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Trust has informed me that a cleaning schedule was not displayed in the men's toilets in the Royal Victoria Hospital High Dependency Unit over the last two weeks. The use of such cleaning schedules is not standard practice in HSC Trusts although we will be exploring the introduction of such measures across HSC Trusts.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the guidelines in place, in relation to the (i) cleaning of exterior public areas; and (ii) emptying of rubbish bins, at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 5817/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All entrances to the hospital are cleared daily by a two person team that operates Monday to Friday between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. This team also ensures that bins within the immediate vicinity of all main hospital entrances are emptied every 2 hours. At the weekend between 7.30am and 4.00pm one member of staff cleans all entrances.

Between 2.00pm-8.00pm a mechanised sweeper cleans entrances roads and hard surfaces on the hospital site.

A grounds contractor is on site Monday to Friday to litter pick and tend to the soft grounds area and certain hard surfaces. An additional two litter pickers have been recently employed.

High Dependency Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if he will implement a full review of hygiene levels at the

High Dependency Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital.
(AQW 5818/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have placed renewed emphasis on the need for high hygiene standards in all of our hospitals. To focus on specific departments would not achieve sustained improvement in standards across all parts of our hospitals. The ongoing programme of independent unannounced inspections of hygiene standards by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority is therefore designed to challenge and improve hygiene practice on the ground in our healthcare facilities.

Disinfection Mats

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to introduce disinfection mats at the public entrances to all hospitals.
(AQW 5819/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to introduce disinfection mats at public entrances to hospitals, as there is no evidence to indicate that these would be effective in the prevention and control of healthcare associated infection.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the guidelines that are in place in relation to carrying open plates of food on to wards at the Royal Victoria Hospital.
(AQW 5820/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast HSC Trust has confirmed that food is not carried to wards on open plates and that the Trust complies with the necessary food safety legislation and Environmental Health guidelines regarding transportation of food at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Diabetes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people that are diagnosed with diabetes.
(AQW 5833/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested. However, under the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, the total number of GP-registered patients aged 17 and over with diabetes mellitus is

recorded. Table 1 shows the total number of people on the QOF diabetes register, as at 14 February 2008.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PATIENTS ON DIABETES REGISTER (AGED 17 AND OVER)

	Number of patients on Diabetes Register (aged 17 and over)
As at 14 February 2008	60,822

Source: Payment Calculation and Analysis System (PCAS).

Arthritis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people diagnosed with arthritis.
(AQW 5834/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to provide the number of people that suffer from arthritis.

It is possible however to provide the number of admissions to hospital where a diagnosis of arthritis was recorded in any diagnostic position.

The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland for patients with a diagnosis of arthritis in the year 2006/07 (the latest for which figures are available) was 7469.

It is estimated that these admissions relate to approximately 4482 individuals.

Asbestosis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people that suffer from asbestosis.
(AQW 5836/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to provide the number of people that suffer from asbestosis.

It is possible however to provide the number of admissions to hospital where an asbestos related diagnosis was recorded in any diagnostic position.

For this analysis asbestos related illnesses have been defined, using the tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), as Mesothelioma, Pneumoconiosis due to asbestos and other mineral fibres, and Pleural Plaque including pleural thickening with the presence of asbestos.

The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland for patients with an asbestos related diagnosis in the year 2006/07 (the latest for which figures are available) was 415.

It is estimated that these admissions relate to approximately 269 individuals.

Heart Disease

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people diagnosed with heart disease. (AQW 5843/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested. However, under the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, the total number of GP-registered patients with coronary heart disease (CHD) is recorded. Table 1 shows the total number of people on the QOF CHD register, as at 14 February 2008.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PATIENTS ON THE CORONARY HEART DISEASE REGISTER.

	Number of patients on CHD Register 1
As at 14 February 2008	75,984

Source: Payment Calculation and Analysis System (PCAS).

Only patients with coronary heart disease are recorded on the QOF CHD register. Patients with other forms of heart disease such as rheumatic heart disease, inflammatory heart disease, and congenital heart disease are not included.

Flattened-Head Syndrome

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cases of flattened-head syndrome that have been diagnosed in the last five years. (AQW 5844/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to provide the number of cases of flattened-head syndrome that have been diagnosed in the last five years.

It is possible however to provide the number of children admitted to hospital where a diagnosis of flattened-head syndrome (plagiocephaly) was recorded in any diagnostic position.

The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland for children with a diagnosis of flattened head syndrome in each of the last five years is shown in the table below.

Year	Number of *Admissions
2002/03	26
2003/04	28
2004/05	34
2005/06	18
2006/07	31

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

* Discharges and Deaths are used as an approximation for admissions. It is possible that any individual could be admitted to hospital more than once in any year and will thus be counted more than once as an admission.

Medical Secretaries

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons why the completion date for pay scale allocation for medical secretaries has been put back to June 2008; and to confirm if this will be the final date by which staff can expect to have their pay scale finally resolved. (AQW 5866/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following discussions with staff representatives, I agreed that, in order to maintain the robustness of the Agenda for Change implementation process and to preserve the partnership arrangements, I would extend the deadline for all staff to be on Agenda for Change rates of pay to 30 June 2008. This change of deadline applies to all groups, not only medical secretaries, and was in recognition of the need to complete a time consuming process. I expect Health and Social Care employers to meet this target for all staff including medical secretaries.

Accident and Emergency Vehicles

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each ambulance station, (i) the age; and (ii) the recorded mileage, of each accident and emergency vehicle. (AQW 5874/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below provides the ambulance station location, age and recorded mileage at 31 March 2008 for each Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Accident and Emergency (A&E) ambulance.

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Altnagelvin	9	1x1	31,862
		2x3	115,085 and
		1x4	45,738
		1x5	113,159
		1x6	110,110
		2x7	66,579
		1x9	78,176 and
			79,009
			134,777

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Antrim	4	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	47,778 134,118 71,422
Ardoyne (Belfast)	4	1x 1 1x 4 1x 5 1x 7	28,121 68,642 115,747 58,514
Armagh	4	1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 9	123,365 164,241 138,804 181,697
Ballycastle	3	1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	131,628 176,636 239,158
Ballymena	4	2x 4 1x 5 1x 9	197,973 and 180,107 241,242 227,996
Ballymoney	3	2x 4 1x 9	107,571 and 169,488 157,164
Banbridge	2	1x 5 1x 8	168,205 179,222
Bangor	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 6 1x 7	63,449 194,365 138,308 119,662
Bridge (Belfast)	5	3x 5 1x 6 1x 7	112,123, 124,537 and 169,109 98,476 127,203
Broadway (Belfast)	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7	23,406 51,349 93,677 66,846 69,348
Carrickfergus	3	1x 1 2x 4	23,577 182,138 and 224,496
Castlederg	2	1x 1 1x 7	25,344 104,056

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Coleraine	5	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6 2x 9	58,713 195,104 111,816 160,662 and 184,241
Cookstown	2	1x 1 1x 5	52,679 130,928
Craigavon	8	2x 1 1x 4 2x 5 1x 6 2x 7	28,538 and 30,487 119,730 126,133 and 149,030 168,732 73,231 and 77,829
Derriaghy	2	2x 5	125,758 and 128,398
Downpatrick	5	1x 2 1x 3 2x 4 1x 6	132,552 179,186 196,700 and 199,832 95,542
Dungannon	6	2x 1 2x 4 1x 6 1x 7	53,266 and 59,525 156,713 and 213,701 312,758 154,168
Enniskillen	5	1x 1 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7 1x 9	24,127 126,226 125,062 176,819 205,938
Knockbracken (Belfast)	3	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	24,108 177,112 95,804
Kilkeel	2	1x 4 1x 6	107,904 120,433
Larne	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5	81,433 128,166 220,230 146,537
Limavady	2	1x 5 1x 9	156,869 208,962

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Lisburn	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 5 1x 6 1x 8	42,464 119,022 137,264 66,420 54,387
Magherafelt	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	86,055 98,165 130,027 112,707 182,107
Newcastle	2	1x 1 1x 7	51,081 224,873
Newry	7	1x 1 1x 4 2x 6 2x 8 1x 9	24,861 126,733 79,022 and 181,858 161,787 and 207,956 136,309
Newtownards	5	4x 5 1x 6	167,033, 172,043, 174,352 and 192,004 106,177
Omagh	7	2x 1 2x 4 1x 5 1x 6 1x 9	39,314 and 40,525 100,097 and 114,354 113,366 118,906 122,103
Strabane	2	1x 4 1x 7	169,583 162,684
Whiteabbey	4	1x 1 2x 4 1x 7	57,447 112,317 and 165,654 136,328

The table below shows the number of new A&E ambulances delivered to each NIAS ambulance station from 2003 to 2007.

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Altnagelvin	1	1	2		1
Antrim	1				1
Ardoyne	1	1			1

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Armagh		1	1		
Ballycastle	1	1			
Ballymena	1	2			
Ballymoney		2			
Banbridge	1				
Bangor			1		1
Bridge (Belfast)	3				
Broadway (Belfast)		1	1		1
Carrickfergus		2			1
Castlederg					1
Coleraine	1				1
Cookstown	1				1
Craigavon	2	1			2
Derriaghy	2				
Downpatrick		2	1	1	
Dungannon		2			2
Enniskillen		1			1
Knockbracken (Belfast)	1				
Kilkeel		1			
Larne	1	1	1		1
Limavady	1				
Lisburn	1		1		1
Magherafelt	1	1	1		1
Newtownards	4				
Newcastle					1
Newry		1			1
Omagh	1	2			2
Strabane		1			
Whiteabbey		2			1

It is a matter for NIAS to determine when its vehicle fleet should be replaced. NIAS is currently preparing a Fleet Strategy which will determine the replacement cycle for its A&E ambulances during the lifetime of the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Number of Ambulances

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of ambulances based at each ambulance station.
(AQW 5875/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below provides the ambulance station location, age and recorded mileage at 31 March 2008 for each Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Accident and Emergency (A&E) ambulance.

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Altnagelvin	9	1x1 2x3 1x4 1x5 1x6 2x7 1x9	31,862 115,085 and 45,738 113,159 110,110 66,579 78,176 and 79,009 134,777
Antrim	4	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	47,778 134,118 71,422
Ardoyne (Belfast)	4	1x 1 1x 4 1x 5 1x 7	28,121 68,642 115,747 58,514
Armagh	4	1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 9	123,365 164,241 138,804 181,697
Ballycastle	3	1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	131,628 176,636 239,158
Ballymena	4	2x 4 1x 5 1x 9	197,973 and 180,107 241,242 227,996
Ballymoney	3	2x 4 1x 9	107,571 and 169,488 157,164
Banbridge	2	1x 5 1x 8	168,205 179,222

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Bangor	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 6 1x 7	63,449 194,365 138,308 119,662
Bridge (Belfast)	5	3x 5 1x 6 1x 7	112,123, 124,537 and 169,109 98,476 127,203
Broadway (Belfast)	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7	23,406 51,349 93,677 66,846 69,348
Carrickfergus	3	1x 1 2x 4	23,577 182,138 and 224,496
Castlederg	2	1x 1 1x 7	25,344 104,056
Coleraine	5	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6 2x 9	58,713 195,104 111,816 160,662 and 184,241
Cookstown	2	1x 1 1x 5	52,679 130,928
Craigavon	8	2x 1 1x 4 2x 5 1x 6 2x 7	28,538 and 30,487 119,730 126,133 and 149,030 168,732 73,231 and 77,829
Derriaghy	2	2x 5	125,758 and 128,398
Downpatrick	5	1x 2 1x 3 2x 4 1x 6	132,552 179,186 196,700 and 199,832 95,542
Dungannon	6	2x 1 2x 4 1x 6 1x 7	53,266 and 59,525 156,713 and 213,701 312,758 154,168

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Enniskillen	5	1x 1 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7 1x 9	24,127 126,226 125,062 176,819 205,938
Knockbracken (Belfast)	3	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	24,108 177,112 95,804
Kilkeel	2	1x 4 1x 6	107,904 120,433
Larne	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5	81,433 128,166 220,230 146,537
Limavady	2	1x 5 1x 9	156,869 208,962
Lisburn	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 5 1x 6 1x 8	42,464 119,022 137,264 66,420 54,387
Magherafelt	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	86,055 98,165 130,027 112,707 182,107
Newcastle	2	1x 1 1x 7	51,081 224,873
Newry	7	1x 1 1x 4 2x 6 2x 8 1x 9	24,861 126,733 79,022 and 181,858 161,787 and 207,956 136,309
Newtownards	5	4x 5 1x 6	167,033, 172,043, 174,352 and 192,004 106,177

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Omagh	7	2x 1 2x 4 1x 5 1x 6 1x 9	39,314 and 40,525 100,097 and 114,354 113,366 118,906 122,103
Strabane	2	1x 4 1x 7	169,583 162,684
Whiteabbey	4	1x 1 2x 4 1x 7	57,447 112,317 and 165,654 136,328

The table below shows the number of new A&E ambulances delivered to each NIAS ambulance station from 2003 to 2007.

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Altnagelvin	1	1	2		1
Antrim	1				1
Ardoyne	1	1			1
Armagh		1	1		
Ballycastle	1	1			
Ballymena	1	2			
Ballymoney		2			
Banbridge	1				
Bangor			1		1
Bridge (Belfast)	3				
Broadway (Belfast)		1	1		1
Carrickfergus		2			1
Castlederg					1
Coleraine	1				1
Cookstown	1				1
Craigavon	2	1			2
Derriaghy	2				
Downpatrick		2	1	1	
Dungannon		2			2
Enniskillen		1			1
Knockbracken (Belfast)	1				
Kilkeel		1			

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Larne	1	1	1		1
Limavady	1				
Lisburn	1		1		1
Magherafelt	1	1	1		1
Newtownards	4				
Newcastle					1
Newry		1			1
Omagh	1	2			2
Strabane		1			
Whiteabbey		2			1

It is a matter for NIAS to determine when its vehicle fleet should be replaced. NIAS is currently preparing a Fleet Strategy which will determine the replacement cycle for its A&E ambulances during the lifetime of the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Accident and Emergency Vehicles

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of new accident and emergency vehicles that were delivered to ambulance depots.

(AQW 5876/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below provides the ambulance station location, age and recorded mileage at 31 March 2008 for each Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Accident and Emergency (A&E) ambulance.

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Altnagelvin	9	1x1 2x3 1x4 1x5 1x6 2x7 1x9	31,862 115,085 and 45,738 113,159 110,110 66,579 78,176 and 79,009 134,777
Antrim	4	1x1 1x5 1x6	47,778 134,118 71,422

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Ardoyne (Belfast)	4	1x1 1x4 1x5 1x7	28,121 68,642 115,747 58,514
Armagh	4	1x3 1x4 1x6 1x9	123,365 164,241 138,804 181,697
Ballycastle	3	1x4 1x5 1x9	131,628 176,636 239,158
Ballymena	4	2x4 1x5 1x9	197,973 and 180,107 241,242 227,996
Ballymoney	3	2x4 1x9	107,571 and 169,488 157,164
Banbridge	2	1x5 1x8	168,205 179,222
Bangor	4	1x1 1x3 1x6 1x7	63,449 194,365 138,308 119,662
Bridge (Belfast)	5	3x5 1x6 1x7	112,123, 124,537 and 169,109 98,476 127,203
Broadway (Belfast)	5	1x1 1x3 1x4 1x6 1x7	23,406 51,349 93,677 66,846 69,348
Carrickfergus	3	1x1 2x4	23,577 182,138 and 224,496
Castlederg	2	1x1 1x7	25,344 104,056
Coleraine	5	1x1 1x5 1x6 2x9	58,713 195,104 111,816 160,662 and 184,241

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Cookstown	2	1x 1 1x 5	52,679 130,928
Craigavon	8	2x 1 1x 4 2x 5 1x 6 2x 7	28,538 and 30,487 119,730 126,133 and 149,030 168,732 73,231 and 77,829
Derriaghy	2	2x 5	125,758 and 128,398
Downpatrick	5	1x 2 1x 3 2x 4 1x 6	132,552 179,186 196,700 and 199,832 95,542
Dungannon	6	2x 1 2x 4 1x 6 1x 7	53,266 and 59,525 156,713 and 213,701 312,758 154,168
Enniskillen	5	1x 1 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7 1x 9	24,127 126,226 125,062 176,819 205,938
Knockbracken (Belfast)	3	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	24,108 177,112 95,804
Kilkeel	2	1x 4 1x 6	107,904 120,433
Larne	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5	81,433 128,166 220,230 146,537
Limavady	2	1x 5 1x 9	156,869 208,962
Lisburn	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 5 1x 6 1x 8	42,464 119,022 137,264 66,420 54,387

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Magherafelt	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	86,055 98,165 130,027 112,707 182,107
Newcastle	2	1x 1 1x 7	51,081 224,873
Newry	7	1x 1 1x 4 2x 6 2x 8 1x 9	24,861 126,733 79,022 and 181,858 161,787 and 207,956 136,309
Newtownards	5	4x 5 1x 6	167,033, 172,043, 174,352 and 192,004 106,177
Omagh	7	2x 1 2x 4 1x 5 1x 6 1x 9	39,314 and 40,525 100,097 and 114,354 113,366 118,906 122,103
Strabane	2	1x 4 1x 7	169,583 162,684
Whiteabbey	4	1x 1 2x 4 1x 7	57,447 112,317 and 165,654 136,328

The table below shows the number of new A&E ambulances delivered to each NIAS ambulance station from 2003 to 2007.

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Altnagelvin	1	1	2		1
Antrim	1				1
Ardoyne	1	1			1
Armagh		1	1		
Ballycastle	1	1			
Ballymena	1	2			
Ballymoney		2			
Banbridge	1				

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Bangor			1		1
Bridge (Belfast)	3				
Broadway (Belfast)		1	1		1
Carrickfergus		2			1
Castlederg					1
Coleraine	1				1
Cookstown	1				1
Craigavon	2	1			2
Derriaghy	2				
Downpatrick		2	1	1	
Dungannon		2			2
Enniskillen		1			1
Knockbracken (Belfast)	1				
Kilkeel		1			
Larne	1	1	1		1
Limavady	1				
Lisburn	1		1		1
Magherafelt	1	1	1		1
Newtownards	4				
Newcastle					1
Newry		1			1
Omagh	1	2			2
Strabane		1			
Whiteabbey		2			1

It is a matter for NIAS to determine when its vehicle fleet should be replaced. NIAS is currently preparing a Fleet Strategy which will determine the replacement cycle for its A&E ambulances during the lifetime of the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Accident and Emergency Vehicles

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if his department replaces accident and emergency vehicles if they are no longer fit for purpose. (AQW 5877/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below provides the ambulance station location, age and recorded mileage at 31 March 2008 for each Northern Ireland

Ambulance Service (NIAS) Accident and Emergency (A&E) ambulance.

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Altnagelvin	9	1x1 2x3 1x4 1x5 1x6 2x7 1x9	31,862 115,085 and 45,738 113,159 110,110 66,579 78,176 and 79,009 134,777
Antrim	4	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	47,778 134,118 71,422
Ardoyne (Belfast)	4	1x 1 1x 4 1x 5 1x 7	28,121 68,642 115,747 58,514
Armagh	4	1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 9	123,365 164,241 138,804 181,697
Ballycastle	3	1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	131,628 176,636 239,158
Ballymena	4	2x 4 1x 5 1x 9	197,973 and 180,107 241,242 227,996
Ballymoney	3	2x 4 1x 9	107,571 and 169,488 157,164
Banbridge	2	1x 5 1x 8	168,205 179,222
Bangor	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 6 1x 7	63,449 194,365 138,308 119,662
Bridge (Belfast)	5	3x 5 1x 6 1x 7	112,123, 124,537 and 169,109 98,476 127,203

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Broadway (Belfast)	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7	23,406 51,349 93,677 66,846 69,348
Carrickfergus	3	1x 1 2x 4	23,577 182,138 and 224,496
Castlederg	2	1x 1 1x 7	25,344 104,056
Coleraine	5	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6 2x 9	58,713 195,104 111,816 160,662 and 184,241
Cookstown	2	1x 1 1x 5	52,679 130,928
Craigavon	8	2x 1 1x 4 2x 5 1x 6 2x 7	28,538 and 30,487 119,730 126,133 and 149,030 168,732 73,231 and 77,829
Derriaghy	2	2x 5	125,758 and 128,398
Downpatrick	5	1x 2 1x 3 2x 4 1x 6	132,552 179,186 196,700 and 199,832 95,542
Dungannon	6	2x 1 2x 4 1x 6 1x 7	53,266 and 59,525 156,713 and 213,701 312,758 154,168
Enniskillen	5	1x 1 1x 4 1x 6 1x 7 1x 9	24,127 126,226 125,062 176,819 205,938
Knockbracken (Belfast)	3	1x 1 1x 5 1x 6	24,108 177,112 95,804

Station	A&E Ambulances	Vehicle Age (years)	Individual Recorded Mileages
Kilkeel	2	1x 4 1x 6	107,904 120,433
Larne	4	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5	81,433 128,166 220,230 146,537
Limavady	2	1x 5 1x 9	156,869 208,962
Lisburn	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 5 1x 6 1x 8	42,464 119,022 137,264 66,420 54,387
Magherafelt	5	1x 1 1x 3 1x 4 1x 5 1x 9	86,055 98,165 130,027 112,707 182,107
Newcastle	2	1x 1 1x 7	51,081 224,873
Newry	7	1x 1 1x 4 2x 6 2x 8 1x 9	24,861 126,733 79,022 and 181,858 161,787 and 207,956 136,309
Newtownards	5	4x 5 1x 6	167,033, 172,043, 174,352 and 192,004 106,177
Omagh	7	2x 1 2x 4 1x 5 1x 6 1x 9	39,314 and 40,525 100,097 and 114,354 113,366 118,906 122,103
Strabane	2	1x 4 1x 7	169,583 162,684
Whiteabbey	4	1x 1 2x 4 1x 7	57,447 112,317 and 165,654 136,328

The table below shows the number of new A&E ambulances delivered to each NIAS ambulance station from 2003 to 2007.

Ambulance Station	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Altnagelvin	1	1	2		1
Antrim	1				1
Ardoyne	1	1			1
Armagh		1	1		
Ballycastle	1	1			
Ballymena	1	2			
Ballymoney		2			
Banbridge	1				
Bangor			1		1
Bridge (Belfast)	3				
Broadway (Belfast)		1	1		1
Carrickfergus		2			1
Castlederg					1
Coleraine	1				1
Cookstown	1				1
Craigavon	2	1			2
Derriaghy	2				
Downpatrick		2	1	1	
Dungannon		2			2
Enniskillen		1			1
Knockbracken (Belfast)	1				
Kilkeel		1			
Larne	1	1	1		1
Limavady	1				
Lisburn	1		1		1
Magherafelt	1	1	1		1
Newtownards	4				
Newcastle					1
Newry		1			1
Omagh	1	2			2
Strabane		1			
Whiteabbey		2			1

It is a matter for NIAS to determine when its vehicle fleet should be replaced. NIAS is currently preparing a Fleet Strategy which will determine the replacement cycle for its A&E ambulances during

the lifetime of the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Supporting People Programme

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain how his department is progressing accommodation as part of the ‘Supporting People’ programme with the Department for Social Development. (AQW 5879/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: One of my top priorities is to resettle long stay patients from Mental Health and Learning Disability hospitals into appropriate places in the community. This process is being taken forward by the Health and Social Care Trusts who provide the service. In some cases this involves the Trust entering into contract with colleagues in the Department for Social Development (DSD) to provide appropriate housing under the “Supporting People” programme. My Department continues to liaise with DSD to ensure that the accommodation needed for Trusts to continue with the resettlement programme is available.

Suicide Prevention Strategy

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons why the Protect Life suicide prevention strategy was not subject to an equality impact assessment. (AQW 5881/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Suicide Prevention Strategy “Protect Life – A Shared Vision” was equality screened during its development, in keeping with the Equality Commission’s guidance. On the basis of the outcome of the equality screening exercise the Department determined that the policy should impact positively on the health and emotional wellbeing of the general population. The Department also determined that the Strategy and Action Plan does not adversely impact on any of the Section 75 groups, and therefore a full equality impact assessment was not required. The majority of responses to public consultation on the draft strategy supported this decision. The forthcoming evaluation of the Strategy will provide a further opportunity to review equality issues.

Budget Allocation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current budget allocation for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5893/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The budgets for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007 – 08 were as follows:

Trust	£M
Belfast	997.0
Northern	476.0
Southern	371.6
South Eastern	416.0
Western	415.1

At this time I am unable to advise on 2008/09 budgets as Trusts are still in ongoing negotiations with their commissioners.

Budget Allocation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current budget allocation for the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5894/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

The budgets for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007 – 08 were as follows:

Trust	£M
Belfast	997.0
Northern	476.0
Southern	371.6
South Eastern	416.0
Western	415.1

At this time I am unable to advise on 2008/09 budgets as Trusts are still in ongoing negotiations with their commissioners.

Budget Allocation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current budget allocation for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5895/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

The budgets for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007 – 08 were as follows:

Trust	£M
Belfast	997.0
Northern	476.0
Southern	371.6
South Eastern	416.0
Western	415.1

At this time I am unable to advise on 2008/09 budgets as Trusts are still in ongoing negotiations with their commissioners.

Budget Allocation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current budget allocation for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5896/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The budgets for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007 – 08 were as follows:

Trust	£M
Belfast	997.0
Northern	476.0
Southern	371.6
South Eastern	416.0
Western	415.1

At this time I am unable to advise on 2008/09 budgets as Trusts are still in ongoing negotiations with their commissioners.

Budget Allocation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current budget allocation for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5897/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

The budgets for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007 – 08 were as follows:

Trust	£M
Belfast	997.0
Northern	476.0
Southern	371.6
South Eastern	416.0

Trust	£M
Western	415.1

At this time I am unable to advise on 2008/09 budgets as Trusts are still in ongoing negotiations with their commissioners.

Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 3 years, (i) the number of cases at the Minor Injuries Unit at the Ards Hospital that have had to be referred to another hospital for further treatment; and (ii) the percentage of total cases that these figures represent. (AQW 5901/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of patients referred to another hospital for further treatment following an attendance at the Minor Injury Unit at Ards Hospital, and the percentage of total patients treated that this figure represents, for the last three years, is contained in the table below:

Year	No. of patient attendances at Ards MIU	No. of patients referred to another hospital for further treatment	% of total attendances referred to another hospital for further treatment
2004/05	9,344	1,434	15.3%
2005/06	10,024	1,363	13.6%
2006/07	10,202	1,314	12.9%

Source: Departmental Return KH09 (Part 2) and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Parental Disciplining

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the legal rights of parents in relation to disciplining their children. (AQW 5911/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Your question relates to the operation of the criminal law, which is a matter for the NIO. There is no law detailing the disciplinary “rights” of parents. The criminal law offers a defence to a charge of assault, which applies in limited circumstances.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of community psychiatric nurses that are currently working in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 5916/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available in the form requested. The North Down area is serviced by the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust. The South Eastern Trust reports that there are 17 community psychiatric/mental health nurses (15.7 whole-time equivalents) working within their North Down & Ards sector.

Graduate Dentists

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the action he is taking to assist graduate dentists to find employment in Northern Ireland. (AQW 5935/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On graduation, every aspiring dentist must undergo a Vocational Training year in a dental practice before they are qualified to practise on their own and hold a health service contract number in the future. Alternatively, they may undergo a two-year period of General Professional Training in a variety of settings such as dental practices, health centres and hospitals.

There are currently 40 dentists graduating annually from Queen’s University. In order to match the number of training places to graduate numbers, my Department has provided additional funding over the past 2 years to increase the number of training places from 30 to 40. In recent years there has been some difficulty in attracting sufficient numbers of high street dentists to become trainers willing to train our new graduates within the Health Service. In order to attract additional trainers into the scheme, I provided £500k additional funding to increase significantly the grants and allowances paid to trainers.

Pellet Guns

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of people treated in hospitals following incidents involving pellet guns. (AQW 5942/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the

number of people treated in hospitals following incidents involving pellet guns.

Search and Rescue Services

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if he will table the issue of search and rescue services at the next appropriate meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council. (AQW 5952/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The agenda for the next meeting of the NSMC in the Health & Food Safety Sectors has not yet been finalised however, the issue of search and rescue services as such are not within the ambit of the North/South areas of co-operation in health.

Domestic Violence

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what assistance is available for victims of domestic violence. (AQW 5957/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are a wide range of statutory and non-statutory agencies providing assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Victims of domestic violence can access support services through the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline. They are also able to seek assistance locally from GPs, Women's Aid offices and social services and should it be necessary, emergency accommodation for women and children can be accessed through Women's Aid offices and also through the NIHE emergency accommodation service.

Regarding the law and legal processes, victims can be assisted by PSNI officers, all of whom now receive domestic violence training. There is also access to specially-trained PSNI Domestic Violence Officers in each police district. Specially-trained court officers can assist victims by helping them through legal processes involving, for example, restraining orders, non-molestation orders and occupation orders.

Ambulance Cover

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of ambulance cover in the East Antrim area. (AQW 5958/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table lists the possible

grants available to farmers (subsidy schemes have been excluded from this information):-

Possible Grants Available for Farmers	Brief Description
The Farm Nutrient Management Scheme.	This is a Capital Grant towards the cost of building slurry storage.
Agri-Environment Schemes:- NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS); Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)	These Schemes will open late spring/early summer 2008. Participants will receive funding Under NICMS for farming in a more environmentally Sensitive manner; Under OFS for farming organically
Seed Potato Levy Fund	Grants are available for advertising and promotional projects.
Woodland Grant Scheme; Farm Woodland Premium Scheme; And Short Rotation Coppice Scheme 2007	Grant aid to farmers and other landowners for creation of new woodland.
Woodland Environment Grant	Grant assistance to support environmental and recreational improvements.
Sustainable Forest Operations Grant	Grant assistance to support environmental and recreational improvements.
Replanting Grant	Grant assistance to support environmental and recreational improvements.
Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme And Agricultural and Forestry Marketing Development Grant Scheme	To improve the economic performance and international competitiveness of the agri-food and forestry sectors.
New Entrants Scheme	Provides young farmers under 40 who meet required eligibility criteria, with a grant in the form of an interest rate subsidy on loans taken out on items for production relating to Agriculture and Horticulture.
Benchmarking	A scheme to facilitate benchmarking of farm and horticultural businesses.
Focus Farms	A scheme to promote new technologies and to provide an opportunity for coaching and/or mentoring.

Possible Grants Available for Farmers	Brief Description
Family Farm Options	A scheme that will help farm families to analyse their current business position and to consider the future.
Supply Chain Partnerships (Training)	A scheme to provide training that will promote supply chain partnerships. This Scheme is linked to the Supply Chain Development Programme.
Farm Modernisation programme	To contribute to the competitiveness of agricultural and horticultural businesses in the North.
Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme: Measure 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3	<p>Farmers may avail of funding under these measures which aim to:-</p> <p>Assist farm households to diversify into non-agricultural activities and, as a consequence, maintain or increase the income of farm households and create employment opportunities.</p> <p>Create employment opportunities through promoting entrepreneurship and developing the economic infrastructure in rural areas by providing support to existing micro enterprises or to persons wishing to set up a new micro-enterprise in a non-agricultural sector.</p> <p>Use the natural resources in the Norths rural areas to attract visitors and create new employment opportunities through the sustainable development of the rural economy by providing support to existing rural tourism enterprises or to persons wishing to set up a new sustainable rural tourism enterprise.</p>
Supply Chain Development Programme (Non-Training)	To increase the number of successful new collaborative initiatives in the agri-food and forestry sectors which will lead to more effective sustainable food supply chains.

NHS Dental Services

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dentists providing NHS dental services in each Health Board area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5973/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in table 1 below:

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF DENTISTS' REGISTERED TO PROVIDE NHS DENTAL SERVICES BY BOARD²

	April 2006	April 2007	April 2008
EHSSB	331	336	351
NHSSB	190	189	195
SHSSB	151	155	165
WHSSB	124	124	123
Northern Ireland ³	753	768	798

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
- In order to obtain a split by Board, dentist numbers are taken from the list of dentists who have NHS contracts with the Health Boards.
- Dentists may work in more than one Health Board, therefore the total for all Health Boards may not equal the Northern Ireland figure.

NHS Dental Services

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dentists who have stopped providing NHS dental services in each Health Board area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5974/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in table 1 below:

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF DENTISTS' WHO HAVE STOPPED PROVIDING NHS DENTAL SERVICES BY BOARD^{2,3}

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
EHSSB	20	32	25
NHSSB	13	15	11
SHSSB	6	9	10
WHSSB	6	16	8
Northern Ireland ⁴	44	69	53

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
- In order to obtain a split by Board, dentist numbers are taken from the list of dentists who have NHS contracts with the Health Boards.
- The statistics represent dentists who have ceased their contract with a Health Board during the financial year specified. This includes dentists who have left the NHS completely for example due to retirement, maternity, moving solely into private practice, or leaving

Northern Ireland to work elsewhere. It also includes dentists who may have ceased work in one Health Board area, but continue to practice NHS work within another Board area.

4. Dentists may work in more than one Health Board therefore the total for all Health Boards may not equal the Northern Ireland figure.

NHS Dental Services

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage change, in NHS dental patients in each Health Board area in each of the last three years. (AQW 5975/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in the tables below:

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF NHS DENTAL PATIENTS^{1,2} REGISTERED WITH PRACTICES LOCATED IN EACH HEALTH BOARD AREA

	2006	2007	2008
EHSSB	368,749	362,868	352,749
NHSSB	228,987	231,389	223,620
SHSSB	181,769	177,498	164,883
WHSSB	129,048	124,145	115,391
Northern Ireland	908,553	895,900	856,643

Source: Central Services Agency

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN NHS DENTAL PATIENTS^{1,2} REGISTERED WITH PRACTICES LOCATED IN EACH HEALTH BOARD AREA.

	2006	2007	2008
EHSSB	-0.19%	-1.59%	-2.79%
NHSSB	0.37%	1.05%	-3.36%
SHSSB	0.67%	-2.35%	-7.11%
WHSSB	-0.78%	-3.80%	-7.05%
Northern Ireland	0.04%	-1.39%	-4.38%

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- Figures are quoted as at April of the relevant year.
- The figures shown relate to patients registered with dental practices located within the specified Boards. It should be noted that these patients do not necessarily reside in the Board in which they are registered.

Diabetic Ketoacidosis

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the number of emergency hospital admissions for diabetic ketoacidosis, broken down

by (i) age; (ii) gender; (iii) type of diabetes; and (iv) Health and Social Services Board. (AQW 6003/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The number of emergency *admissions to Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of diabetic ketoacidosis, in each of the last three years, broken down by age is shown in the table below.

Age	06/07	05/06	04/05
0	<5	0	0
1-4	6	<5	8
5-9	16	20	29
10-14	63	59	56
15-19	105	84	94
20-24	81	62	53
25-29	59	29	36
30-34	51	50	46
35-39	41	39	35
40-44	45	38	33
45-49	39	27	22
50-54	23	23	20
55-59	18	21	14
60-64	12	18	13
65-69	10	11	10
70-74	24	16	6
75-79	17	16	15
80-84	17	13	7
85-89	5	<5	<5
90-94	<5	<5	6
95-99	0	0	0
100-104	0	0	<5
105+	0	0	0

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

- (ii) The number of emergency *admissions to Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of diabetic ketoacidosis, in each of the last three years, broken down by gender is shown in the table below.

Gender	06/07	05/06	04/05
Male	299	242	246
Female	335	294	260

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

- (iii) The number of emergency *admissions to Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of diabetic ketoacidosis, in each of the last three years, broken down by type of diabetes is shown in the table below.

Type of Diabetes	06/07	05/06	04/05
Insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus	548	464	434
Non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus	64	52	55
Malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus	0	0	0
Other specified diabeted mellitus	<5	0	<5
Unspecified diabetes mellitus	21	20	16

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

- (iii) The number of emergency *admissions to Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of diabetic ketoacidosis, in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Services Board of residence is shown in the table below.

Health Board of Residence Name	06/07	05/06	04/05
Eastern	234	235	299
Northern	131	150	171
Southern	64	97	73
Western	74	51	87
Other	<5	<5	<5

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

* Discharges and Deaths are used as an approximation for admissions. It is possible that any individual could be admitted to hospital more than once in any year and will thus be counted more than once as an admission.

Outpatient Clinic Appointments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of outpatient clinic appointments missed at (i) the Ulster hospital; and (ii) the Ards hospital, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6016/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of outpatient clinic appointments missed in Ards and Ulster hospitals, in each of the last three years, is provided in the table below. These figures represent the number of

outpatient appointments where a patient did not attend and failed to give advance warning to the hospital.

Hospital	Year		
	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Ards	2,969	2,917	3,148
Ulster	15,073	15,022	14,499

Source: Departmental Return KH09 (Part 1)

2007/08 data are currently being compiled.

Outpatient Clinic Appointments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of outpatient clinic appointments cancelled at (i) the Ulster hospital; and (ii) the Ards hospital, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6017/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of outpatient clinic appointments cancelled in Ards and Ulster hospitals is not available centrally.

Dental Graduates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dental graduates who (i) have; and (ii) have not, been able to find a training place in Northern Ireland for each of the past five years. (AQW 6035/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures available are for the academic years 2002-03 to 2006-07.

Academic Year	No of Graduates	No of training places accepted
2002-03	29	18 QUB out of 24 recruited
2003-04	35	21 QUB out of 25 recruited
2004-05	40	21 QUB out of 25 recruited
2005-06	39	21 QUB out of 28 recruited
2006-07	38	22 QUB out of 28 recruited

- (i) Source: QUB

- (ii) In total two QUB graduates have been unable to take up a training place in the United Kingdom in the last five years. Both were unsuccessful in their selections for the local Vocational Training

Scheme and they were not prepared to leave Northern Ireland to consider a place on GB schemes.

One graduate in the 2006/07 year was taken on as a dental assistant in a predominantly NHS practice and was subsequently successful in his application to the Vocational Training Scheme in 2007/08.

Another graduate in the 2007/08 year was likewise taken on as a dental assistant in a strong NHS practice and has re-entered the Vocational Training Scheme for the 2008/09 year.

Dental Graduates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the steps he is taking to help dental graduates find training places in Northern Ireland. (AQW 6036/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Independent Recruitment and Selection Panels are set up and operated by the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency for trainers and trainees in the Vocational Training Scheme in Northern Ireland. The training practices are located throughout Northern Ireland. Graduates who do not obtain a place within their preferred practice, and who are not prepared to take up places in GB, are encouraged to accept dental assistant positions. They can then re-apply for the Vocational Training Scheme in open competition the following year.

Dental Graduates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of students who have graduated in dentistry from universities in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. (AQW 6037/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Dental School at Queens University, Belfast is the only institution in Northern Ireland that teaches dentistry. The graduate numbers for the periods 2002 to 2007 are listed in the table below. Figures are not available as yet for the academic year 2007/08.

Academic Year	No of Graduates
2002-03	29
2003-04	35
2004-05	40
2005-06	39

Academic Year	No of Graduates
2006-07	38

Source: QUB

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff in his department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6040/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is outlined in the table below.

No of Staff who have Received an Official Warning	No of Staff who have faced Disciplinary Procedures
27	0

All staff who receive an official warning as a result of sickness absence are automatically excluded from applying for promotion for a period of six months. Occupational sick pay is also withdrawn for those on a final written warning. None of the staff who received an official warning applied for promotion during the six month exclusion period and those on a final written warning did not have any periods of sickness absence during the six month period.

Community and Voluntary Sector

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the groups funded by his department to provide counselling within the community and voluntary sector; and (ii) the specific function (e.g. suicide prevention, drug counselling etc) these groups are funded to provide. (AQW 6046/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department funds a large number of voluntary and community groups through either core or project funding, many of whom provide a range of counselling services. Core funding for regional infrastructure organisations are currently offered for the purposes of advancing policy development and delivery through activities such as advocacy, lobbying and training. Project funding is awarded for a maximum of three years and is non recurrent. While this funding does not necessarily directly fund the counselling service provided by those groups, without this provision, the service provided would not be possible, or would be greatly reduced.

The list below details those voluntary and community groups that provide counselling services, and the specific functions these groups provide:

Organisation	Specific Function	Funding Stream
NEXUS	Counselling for adult survivors of sexual abuse; Therapeutic intervention for victims of sexual abuse. The project works with children/young people aged 13-25 year olds and their families.	Core
ChildLine	Counselling helpline for children and young people up to the age of 18.	Core
Church of Ireland Adoption Society	Counselling for those affected by adoption; Infertility counselling.	Core
Family Care Society	Counselling for those affected by adoption	Core
Fostering Network	Counselling and Support services for carers, social workers and anyone else involved in foster care.	Core
Relate	Relationship Counselling	Core
Accord	Relationship Counselling	Core
Presbyterian Board of Social Witness	Marriage Counselling	Core
Alzheimer's Society	Counselling for those affected by alzheimer's	Core
Life (NI)	Pregnancy Loss Counselling Service, including counselling after abortion and counselling or support after miscarriage or stillbirths.	Core
Rainbow Project	Gay-male-specific counselling service for gay and bisexual men	Project

Organisation	Specific Function	Funding Stream
Institute of Counselling and Personal Development	Funding of the salary of a qualified Counsellor, specialising in Learning Disability	Core
Downs Syndrome Association	Counselling training, through ICPD, to 14 parents who engage with new parents, if required, to provide advice and guidance. Counselling is also provided to people who are considering termination.	Core
Autism NI	Counselling service of advice and guidance to parents whose children have been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.	Core
Barnardo's	Counselling children and young people aged between 5 and 12 years who have experienced domestic violence.	Children's Fund
Threshold	Applied psychotherapy for children and young people to help alleviate the psychological and emotional distress which affects 10-20% of people aged 6-18 years residing in the Northern Board area.	Children's Fund
Wave Trauma	Provides a range of support and personal development programmes to children, young people and adults who have been directly bereaved or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in NI.	Children's Fund
Contact Youth	Counselling services for children and young people aged between 11 and 25 years in the Northern Board area.	Children's Fund

Details of every grant made to a voluntary or community group in Northern Ireland by NI Departments are listed on the Government Funders

Database. Members of the public can interrogate this database through the following website: www.volcomgrantsni.gov.uk

Community and Voluntary Sector

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the groups currently funded by his department to provide counselling within the community and voluntary sector, who will no longer receive funding in the 2009/2010 financial year. (AQW 6048/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department funds a large number of voluntary and community groups through either core or project funding, many of whom provide counselling services. Core funding follows a three year funding cycle and there are no plans to cease core funding to those groups already in receipt of same.

In relation to those projects providing counselling services that have been previously supported by the Children's Fund, DHSSPS will continue to support them in 2008/09 through a combination of funding secured through my Departments budget and centrally earmarked funds. I will consider funding some organisations beyond this date, but decisions on funding beyond March 2009 will be based on a detailed appraisal of each project and the benefit it accrues. Arrangements for this appraisal will be made clear in the coming weeks.

Consultants Vacancy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of vacancy for Consultants. (AQW 6059/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest information available is provided in the table below.

Vacancies as at 30th September 2007				
Consultants	Headcount	Headcount rate	WTE	WTE rate
Current vacancies	39	2.95%	38.0	3.04%
Long-term vacancies	25	1.91%	23.5	1.90%

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

1. WTE = whole-time equivalent.
2. A current vacancy is defined as an unoccupied post which the organisation was actively trying to fill. A long-term vacancy is an unoccupied post which had been vacant for three months or more and

which the organisation was actively trying to fill.

3. The vacancy rate is the total number of vacancies expressed as a percentage of the total staff complement (i.e. vacancies plus staff in post).
4. Includes both medical and dental consultants.

Nurses Vacancy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of vacancy for nurses. (AQW 6060/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest information available is provided in the table below.

Vacancies as at 30th September 2007				
Nurses	Headcount	Headcount rate	WTE	WTE rate
Current vacancies	300	1.8%	269.88	1.9%
Long-term vacancies	146	0.9%	134.47	1.0%

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

5. WTE = whole-time equivalent.
6. A current vacancy is defined as an unoccupied post which the organisation was actively trying to fill. A long-term vacancy is an unoccupied post which had been vacant for three months or more and which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
7. The vacancy rate is the total number of vacancies expressed as a percentage of the total staff complement (i.e. vacancies plus staff in post).

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to put Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanners in all major hospitals. (AQW 6061/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not purchase magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners; it is the responsibility of individual Trusts to determine and provide diagnostic imaging services and equipment consistent with their hospitals' service profiles.

There are currently 11 MRI scanners in Northern Ireland, located at Belfast City, Mater, Musgrave Park, Royal Victoria, Antrim Area, Ulster, Craigavon Area and Altnagelvin Area hospitals.

Director of Public Health

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans for a Director of Public Health. (AQW 6062/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not in position to detail plans for a Director of Public Health until the current consultation on the Proposals for Health and Social Care Reform has ended and the responses considered. The consultation is due to end on 12 May 2008.

Dental Care

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider free dental care to all persons aged over 65 years. (AQW 6071/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I currently have no plans to consider making dental care free to all persons aged over 65 years.

The Department's policy on entitlement to help with health service charges is based on the principle that those who can afford to contribute should do so, while those who are likely to have difficulty in paying should be protected. People who are exempt from dental charges include the vulnerable members in the community such as children under 18, young people under the age of 19 who are in full-time education and also pregnant and nursing mothers.

People receiving Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (income based) and Pension Credit Guarantee Credit are automatically entitled to full remission of Health Service charges, as are those people named on a valid HC2 certificate (an HC2 certificate is a certificate issued to people on a low income which exempts them from Health Service charges during the period for which it is valid).

For anyone who is not exempt or automatically entitled to full remission of Health Service charges but who may, nevertheless, have difficulty in paying, full or partial remission of Health Service charges is available through the Health Service Low Income Scheme. Assistance from the scheme is income-related and is based on an assessment of each person's ability to pay in the light of their financial circumstances at the time a claim is made or a charge was paid. Claims are made on an HC1 form and are assessed by the Social Security Agency.

Health Service Dentists

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Health Service dentists in the Omagh and Strabane areas and within the West Tyrone constituency. (AQW 6072/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in table 1 below:

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF DENTISTS' REGISTERED TO PROVIDE NHS DENTAL SERVICES.

	Number of dentists
Omagh LGD	25
Strabane LGD	15
West Tyrone constituency	40

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.

Health Service Dentists

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment on the number of dentists accepting new Health Service patients in the Omagh and Strabane areas. (AQW 6073/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware that there is at present, a lack of dental practices in the Omagh and Strabane areas willing to actively accept new Health Service patients to their practice lists. The Department however is unable to detail exactly what practices in these areas are willing to accept new health service patients as this information can change daily.

Currently there are 10 dental practices employing 24 dentists in Omagh and 5 dental practices employing 13 dentists in Strabane who are all registered on the dental list of the Central Services Agency (CSA) to facilitate the undertaking of health service dentistry. The decision as to whether a dentist is willing to accept or discontinue health service work is a matter for the individual dentist, who is free to decide to increase or decrease the numbers of health service patients he or she is prepared to take at any given time.

There is no obligation on dentists to accept a patient for health service treatment, nor do current contractual arrangements permit Health and Social Services Boards to compel dentists to provide Health

Service dental services. Dental practices in Omagh and Strabane are under no obligation to inform the Western Health Board of which patients they are treating under the Health Service or under a private contract.

AQW 6073/08: THE NUMBER OF DENTISTS' ACCEPTING NEW² HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN THE OMAGH AND STRABANE AREAS

Town	No. NHS Dentists ¹ Accepting New ² Health Service Patients
Omagh	22
Strabane	10

1. Principal dentists that are registered on the Dental List. Excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners (VDPs).
2. A new Health Service patient is defined as a patient registered with a NHS dentist at March 2008, but not at April 2007.

Statistics are at 21st April 2008 and are based on the location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Not all patients receiving health service dental treatment are exempt from paying dental fees. Those patients who aren't automatically exempt will be required to pay 80% of the cost of the treatment, up to a maximum of £384. Unlike health service dentistry however, the charges for private dental treatment are not regulated by the Department and are generally speaking more expensive than health service charges.

Ambulance Cover

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of ambulance cover in the East Derry/Londonderry constituency. (AQW 6080/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western and Northern Health and Social Services Boards are responsible for commissioning ambulance services in the East Londonderry constituency area from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. The level of cover commissioned is determined on the same basis as for other parts of Northern Ireland and takes into account such factors as the rural nature of the area and local patterns of demand for emergency ambulances. Ambulance cover is provided primarily by resources operating from ambulance stations as follows:

LIMAVADY AMBULANCE STATION

Monday to Sunday:	1 x A&E resource	24 hours per day
-------------------	------------------	------------------

COLERAINE AMBULANCE STATION

Monday to Sunday:	1 x A&E resource	24 hours per day
-------------------	------------------	------------------

Monday to Sunday:	1 x A&E resource	0800 to 1600hours
		(finishes at 1700 hours on a Monday)
Monday to Sunday:	1 x RRV	0800 to 2000hours

These resources are deployed on the basis of NIAS's tactical deployment plan for the Western and Northern Board areas. The plan enables ambulance control to predict the basis of historical data, where demand for ambulances is most likely to originate and deploy ambulances accordingly.

Local Commissioning Groups

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will include dentists on local commissioning groups. (AQW 6083/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The inclusion of a dentist in the composition of local commissioning groups will be considered as part of the response to the public consultation which closes on 12 May 2008.

Staff Absence

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the disciplines within his department with the highest sickness absence records. (AQW 6085/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The disciplines in DHSSPS with the highest sickness absence in 2006/07 were the general service grades.

Staff Absence

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the sick absence costs in his department for (i) 2005 to 2007 inclusive; and (ii) the first three months of 2008. (AQW 6086/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on absence statistics is held in financial years. The costs of absence in the 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 years is outlined below.

Year	Costs
2005/06	£1.1 million
2006/07	£1.2 million
1 April 2007-29 February 2008	£983,000

Staff Absence

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the policies and provisions that have been made by his department to manage sickness absence among Health Service employees in relation to (i) ill health retirement; (ii) rehabilitation in the workplace; and (iii) other support services. (AQW 6087/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is the responsibility of individual employers to develop local policies and procedures for the management of sickness absence within their own organisation.

The Department does set absenteeism targets and assists Health and Social Care employers in the development of policies and guidance on best practice.

Staff Absence

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 3 years, (i) the average number of days per ward staff member lost to sickness in his department; and (ii) the primary reasons cited by health workers as the main causes for sick absence. (AQW 6088/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data on staff sick absence is collected by staff group, by Trust and is not broken down to ward level. The reason for sick absence is not collected.

Efficiency Targets

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how his department and the health trusts will achieve efficiency savings, and to outline the services that will be affected by these savings. (AQW 6104/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All Departments must achieve 3% efficiency targets per annum across the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period in line with Executive agreement. For DHSSPS this amounts to £118/£233/£344m expressed cumulatively and therefore all services and all provision must be kept under review. It is incumbent on us to take the opportunity now to look across the new Trusts and to reshape services where they can be provided more efficiently and effectively. Where monies are freed up, we will invest them into new service developments for the benefit of patients and clients across Northern Ireland.

I anticipate making savings from RPA, from further pharmaceutical savings and from increased

productivity. Detailed proposals are still being developed. Given the extent of the savings required, I am looking for efficiency across the whole of the departmental baseline.

Drug Addiction

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of registered drug addicts, broken down either by parliamentary constituency or Health Board area. (AQW 6105/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index holds information on all those persons registered in concurrence with the Misuse of Drugs (Notification of and Supply to Addicts) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1973. The table below shows the number of persons registered for drug addictions in Northern Ireland on the 31st December 2007 by Health and Social Services Board area.

	31st December 2007
Eastern HSSB	114
Northern HSSB	102
Southern HSSB	12
Western HSSB	16
Northern Ireland	257 ¹

¹ This figure includes 13 individuals for whom Health and Social Services Board could not be established.

Number of Alcoholics

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of alcoholics, broken down either by parliamentary constituency or Health Board area. (AQW 6106/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Alcohol and Drug Misuse

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the assistance currently available for (i) alcoholics; and (ii) drug addicts. (AQW 6108/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are a wide range of addiction services currently offered to those experiencing the effects of alcohol and drug misuse in Northern

Ireland, covering types of treatment such as detoxification, rehabilitation, substitute prescribing and therapeutic counselling (both for adults and young people). These services are provided in a range of setting including peoples' homes, the community and voluntary sector, health and social care facilities, and hospital in-patient units.

DHSSPS Spend on EQIA and Consultations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money his department has spent on (i) equality impact assessments; and (ii) consultations, over the last three years. (AQW 6118/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the 3 year period from 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2008 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's spend on (i) Equality Impact Assessments; and (ii) Consultations, was as follows:

Financial Year	Equality Impact Assessments	Consultations
2005/06	£6,491	£133,121
2006/07	£10,516	£52,382
2007/08	£14,299	£74,303

It should be noted that the consultation costs are based purely on hard charges incurred through, for example, advertising, publicity and workshops, whereas the Equality Impact Assessment costs are notional based on estimated staff time.

Ulster Hospital

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any proposals to refurbish and modernise the Ulster hospital, Dundonald, over the next three years. (AQW 6152/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The redevelopment and modernisation of the Ulster Hospital is progressing rapidly with work on the Renal Unit, Maternity Unit and terraced car park now complete. Work on the multi-storey Critical Care Complex is underway and is expected to be completed in 2010. In addition, the refurbishment of the Care of the Elderly building will be completed later this year and will provide enhanced wards for Elderly medicine, a Dementia Assessment Unit and an In-Patient Psychiatric Unit. All of these projects involve a capital investment of £100 million.

Drug and Alcohol Dependencies

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how his department will provide treatment through Health and Social Care facilities for young people with drug and alcohol dependencies. (AQW 6269/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The four local Health & Social Services Boards commission and fund a number of specialist services that provide treatment through Health and Social Care facilities for young people with drug and alcohol dependencies based on a 4-tier model. These typically consist of:

- Tier 2/3 Counselling, Support & Mentoring Services for young people under 18; and
- Tier 3/4 specialist treatment services for young people under 18;

Young people also have access to generic primary/secondary care services who will meet other physical/mental health needs that may arise because of dependency to drugs and/or alcohol.

Health Service Dental Treatment

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5954/08, to detail, for each year since 2004, the number of patients who received Health Service dental treatment, broken down by Health Board. (AQW 6347/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF PATIENTS WHO RECEIVED HEALTH SERVICE DENTAL TREATMENT¹ BY HEALTH BOARD²

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
EHSSB	305,538	302,693	298,453	288,392
NHSSB	180,705	180,408	181,054	172,176
SHSSB	138,986	139,079	137,010	127,308
WHSSB	102,548	100,547	96,659	87,821
Northern Ireland ³	722,133	717,325	707,986	670,298

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

1. Patients receiving health service dental treatment is defined as those patients who have had claims for dental treatments submitted to the Central Services Agency by their dentist in the year specified. Where only a check-up has taken place with no further work, this is also counted as a treatment.
2. Health Board of patient is determined by the location of the dental surgery where the patient is treated.

3. Patients may be treated by more than one dentist in more than one Health Board throughout the year and therefore the sum of the Health Boards may be greater than the Northern Ireland total.

Newry Ambulance Station

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, from the beginning of April 2008, (i) the number of occasions; (ii) the dates, that ambulances were not readily available in Newry Ambulance Station; (iii) the reasons for this; and (iv) the action he is taking to ensure that the situation will not be repeated.

(AQW 6477/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the information requested.

Vehicle	Number of Occasions Unavailable	Dates Unavailable	Reason
A	4	1 – 3 April	Air suspension fault
		8 – 9 April	Ramp repair
		18 – 23 April	Rear step and N/S door repair
		24 – 25 April	N/S door problem Ramp repair
B	2	2 April	Side door repair
		15 – 17 April	Air suspension fault
C	3	4 – 5 April	Drugs cupboard door fault
		8 – 10 April	Horn and exhaust fault
		17 – 18 April	Air suspension and communication radio faults
D	2	8 -25 April	Clutch repair and Service/ MOT
		27 -28 April	Wrong fuel fill
E	1	15 – 17 April	Air suspension problem
F	2	6 – 18 April	Starter problem
		21 April	Ignition key problem

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has procedures in place to manage the reassignment of vehicles between stations in the event of breakdowns or maintenance. The application of these procedures ensured that emergency response times in Newry did not fall during this period.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) is developing a fleet strategy with the aim of providing a framework which will underpin the development and replacement of a fit for purpose and cost effective ambulance fleet. In support of this I have made available £14.5m towards capital funding in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period up to 2011 which will provide for a programme of vehicle replacement as well as address other priorities across the Ambulance Service.

Newry Ambulance Station

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the mechanical condition of ambulances currently in use in Newry Ambulance Station; and to detail the average mileage on these vehicles to date.

(AQW 6479/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has advised me that all its vehicles are maintained and serviced regularly. The seven Accident and Emergency ambulances based at Newry Ambulance Station have valid MOT certificates and are, therefore, roadworthy. Their average mileage at 31 March 2008 was 138,374.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Road Bridges

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the width of the Annaghroe and Knockaginny approach roads and the cost of any widening scheme to accommodate two new road bridges.

(AQW 5792/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): The widths of the running surface on the Annaghroe Road and Knockaginny Road are approximately 5m and 3.5m respectively. These widths will be increased over short distances on the approaches to the bridges to 6m over Annaghroe Bridge and 5.5m over Knockaginny Bridge. These widths will allow vehicles to pass freely and safely on the bridges. The costs of the localised widening

on the approaches to the bridges are included in the overall reinstatement costs to be paid by the Southern Government.

Road Bridges

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development whether a road bridge across the Blackwater at Annaghroe would necessitate the removal or major alteration of the nineteenth century cut stone bridge that straddles the road on the Glaslough side, and to detail any alterations that would be necessary. (AQW 5793/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The removal or alteration of the bridge referred to, is a matter for Monaghan County Council. My information to date is that they have no plans to remove or alter the bridge.

Road Bridges

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, in promoting the plan to build road bridges across the Blackwater at Annaghroe and Knockaginny, the cross border Natural Resource Tourism Strategy launched in May 2001 was fully considered and to detail any action he intends to take in relation to this. (AQW 5794/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Natural Resource Tourism Strategy has not yet been considered, but will be as the scheme is progressed.

Road Bridges

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is aware that Annaghroe Meadows are officially designated as an international wildlife sanctuary and to detail the environmental impact of widening the Annaghroe Road to accommodate a new road bridge. (AQW 5795/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As it is not proposed to widen the Annaghroe Road, other than minor localised widening at the immediate approaches to the bridge, there will be no environmental impact on the Annaghroe Meadows.

Road Safety

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps being taken to improve road safety at New Line Crescent, Killyleagh. (AQW 5804/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I understand that you met with an official from my Department's Roads Service, on 5 March 2008, to discuss possible safety measures at this location.

As a result of that meeting, a classifier will be placed on the road to quantify the volume and speed of traffic.

In the meantime, the hazard warning line on the centre of the road will be upgraded to a width of 150 mm to make it more conspicuous.

Road Accidents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will implement an independent review of the Mountstewart Road, Carrowdore, to ascertain the reasons for the high number of accidents on that road. (AQW 5805/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In response to accidents occurring on the Mountstewart Road, my Department's Roads Service enhanced signage and recently completed resurfacing work on the section of the Mountstewart Road, between the Portaferry Road and the bend close to house No 24, to help improve driver awareness and driving conditions.

Speed and inattention by drivers are considered to be the most likely cause of accidents at this locality and an independent review is not considered necessary or appropriate.

However, Roads Service will continue to monitor the situation in conjunction with the PSNI. Should further work be required, this will be considered, subject to finance being available and the relative priority of other demands in the Ards Council area.

Parking Tickets

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of parking tickets issued in South Belfast. (AQW 5845/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As my Department's Roads Service took over responsibility for on-street parking enforcement in October 2006 I therefore do not have figures for Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued prior to this.

Under the new arrangements PCNs were first issued on 13 November 2006, however PCNs issued in Belfast are not collated on a constituency basis and I am, therefore, unable to give you figures for South Belfast.

However, the table below provides details the number of tickets issued in Belfast from 13 November 2006 to 31 March 2008.

Period	Number of Parking Tickets Issued in Belfast
13 November 2006 to 31 March 2007	14,797
1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	47,876

Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works

Mr McFarland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for the last 2 years, (i) the number of occasions that the contract for the Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works has been broken, in relation to the odour emission limits; and (ii) the financial penalties that have been incurred by the contractor. (AQW 5870/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that, during the two year period to the end of February 2008, there were 21 occasions when Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works exceeded the odour emission requirements of the contract.

The financial penalties incurred by the contractor as a result of these failures are deemed to be commercially sensitive information which Northern Ireland Water is unable to release.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 10 years, the total value of the subsidy to Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 5904/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of the total value of subsidy paid to Northern Ireland Railways for each of the last 10 years are set out below:

Years	Subsidy £m
98/99	10.4
99/00	12.6
00/01	23.4
01/02	49.1
02/03	62.0
03/04	39.7
04/05	67.4
05/06	57.4
06/07	32.3
07/08	51.6

Plant Equipment

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total value of Roads Service plant equipment. (AQW 5913/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The current total asset value for my Department's Roads Service plant and vehicle equipment is £9 million.

Plant Equipment

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the amount of money Roads Service has spent on purchasing plant equipment. (AQW 5914/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The amount spent (rounded to the nearest £100k) by Roads Service on purchasing plant and vehicle equipment, for each of the last five years, is as follows:

2003/04	£3.7m
2004/05	£4.2m
2005/06	£2.7m
2006/07	£2.5m
2007/08	£2.6m

Plant Equipment

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the amount of money Roads Service has spent on plant hire. (AQW 5915/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The amount of money my Department's Roads Service has spent (rounded to the nearest £100k) on plant and vehicle hire, for each of the last five years, is as follows:

2003/04	£1.4m
2004/05	£1.3m
2005/06	£1.4m
2006/07	£1.2m
2007/08	£1.3m

Departmental Land

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the land owned by the Roads Service in Moneymore. (AQW 5922/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service owns a small parcel of land within the Moneymore development limit. This land is approximately 225 square metres in area and is located on the east side of the Station Road, approximately 800 metres north of the High Street/Lawford Street/Smith Street junction.

Glenariff Road

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost of providing a new footpath along the Glenariff Road outside Waterfoot. (AQW 5950/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that the scheme to construct a footway along Glenariff Road, Waterfoot, is programmed to be completed by the end of June 2008 and the total estimated cost of the scheme is £216,000.

Glenariff Road

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of compensation paid to householders along the Glenariff Road for the use of their land during construction of a new footpath; and to confirm if this compensation included the construction of boundary walls for all of the affected properties. (AQW 5951/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The amount paid in compensation to householders along the Glenariff Road, including costs associated with land acquisition and disturbance is approximately £9,400. I can confirm that the compensation paid did not include the construction of boundary walls. Where appropriate, boundary walls or fences were, or will be constructed as part of the agreed accommodation works for the scheme.

Ballagh and Cortynan Crossings

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5055/08, to detail the process and methodology used, and factors considered, in calculating these figures. (AQW 6026/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As I advised in my previous response to the Member (AQW 5055/08), my Department's Roads Service does not have any traffic monitoring information pertaining to the Ballagh and Cortynan crossings. The figures provided are estimates based upon the experience and local knowledge of the officials concerned.

Newcastle to Hilltown Road

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider upgrading the Newcastle to Hilltown road, County Down. (AQW 6032/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that the Newcastle to Hilltown road has recently been the subject of extensive maintenance works, which have included the resurfacing of approximately 0.5 kilometres of the B8 Castlewella Road, Hilltown; and 1.5 kilometres of the B180 Bryansford Road. Roads Service also plans to resurface an additional 1.5 kilometres of the B180 Bryansford Road. However, commencement of this work will be dependant on the availability of funding.

Roads Service has no plans to carry out any further works to upgrade this road at present. Officials will, however, continue to carry out regular inspections, to ensure that the road is maintained in accordance with approved maintenance standards. Any defects identified, will be prioritised and repaired accordingly.

Frances Street, Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a timescale within which work will be carried out to repair a large hole in the surface outside the new development at Frances Street, Newtownards. (AQW 6070/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is aware of a depression of the carriageway surface around an existing manhole cover outside a new development at Frances Street, Newtownards and I am advised that this has been noted for repair.

However, as the depression is not considered to be hazardous to traffic, it does not fall into the category of defect, (within Roads Service's maintenance guidelines) commanding an immediate response. I am advised that a repair will be carried out when it can be fitted into the work programme around other repairs of a more urgent nature. Consequently, I regret that I cannot provide you with a timescale for the execution of the work at this time.

Railway Halt in Ballykelly

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider forming a departmental working group with the Ministry of Defence to develop plans for a railway halt in Ballykelly. (AQW 6084/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

The possibility of a railway halt at Ballykelly is being considered as part of a Belfast to Derry Infrastructure Capacity Study project which Translink are conducting. The project is aimed at developing an infrastructure strategy to facilitate improved frequency of services on the line from 2012.

The review will consider the optimum location of a halt serving the Limavady/Ballykelly area. A halt at Ballykelly would be one option to be considered.

This study is at a high level and will be considered further during the Feasibility stage of the Coleraine to Derry track relay project. Translink will engage with key stakeholders as part of the Feasibility and Preliminary Design process.

In these circumstances I am not considering forming a working group to develop plans for a halt at Ballykelly.

Departmental Spending

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of money his department has spent on (i) equality impact assessments; and (ii) consultations, over the last three years. (AQW 6117/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The money spent is set out in the table below. In one case in 2005/06 and one case in 2006/07 it was not possible to disaggregate the costs of the equality impact assessment from the wider consultation costs. The total costs of these consultations have been included in the Equality Impact Assessment column.

Financial Year	Equality Impact Assessments Costs	Consultations Costs	Total Costs
2005/06	£23,348	£3,369	£26,717
2006/07	£45,570	£79,806	£125,376
2007/08	Nil	£12,408	£12,408

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6122/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: While my Department does not collate details of land sold on a constituency basis, I am able to provide you with details of land sold by the Department in the

North Down Borough Council area since 2002. This information is set out in the table below:

Year	Address	Area (Hectares)	Negotiated Price (£k's)
2002/03	Land adjacent to Cayman Avenue, Balloo Road, Bangor	0.326	275
	7 Balloo Road, Bangor	0.013	0.4
	Plot 1, East Circular Road, Bangor	0.155	0.2
	52 Main Street, Conlig	0.024	8
2003/04	6 Balloo Road, Bangor	0.025	0.5
2004/05	2 & 8 Balloo Road, Bangor	0.001	0.65
	East Circular Road, Bangor	0.035	5
2005/06	138 Ballycrochan Road, Bangor	0.003	0.6
	48 Bangor Road, Holywood	0.016	1.5
	5 Donaghadee Road, Bangor	0.018	107.5
	Plot 2, East Circular Road, Bangor	0.031	0.25
	39 Primacy Road, Bangor	0.023	0.5
	21A Windermere Drive, Bangor	0.015	4.75
2006/07	51 Bangor Road, Conlig	0.014	5.5
	171 Gransha Road, Bangor	0.008	1
	21 Seahill Road, Holywood	0.001	0.45
2007/08	121 Hamilton Road, Bangor	House	182.5
	115 Hamilton Road, Bangor	0.045	270
	1 Rockport Rise, Craigavad	0.010	3.25
	19 Seahill Road, Craigavad	0.019	17.5
	15 Seahill Road, Craigavad	0.020	17.5
	17 Seahill Road, Craigavad	0.017	17.5

Year	Address	Area (Hectares)	Negotiated Price (£k's)
2007/08	The Vennel, Bangor	0.207	550
	13 Windrush, Groomsport	0.010	1

Ambulance Travel

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development if his department has plans to work with the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on a joint policy for improving emergency ambulance travel at peak times on the busy motorway routes within the catchment area of Antrim hospital.

(AQW 6126/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are no current plans to work with the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) on a joint policy for improving emergency ambulance travel at peak times on the busy motorway routes, within the catchment area of Antrim Area Hospital.

While the motorway in the vicinity of Antrim Area Hospital is a busy stretch of road, Roads Service is not aware of any specific problems or undue delays being experienced by emergency vehicles, such as ambulances. No approach has been made by the DHSSPS to highlight issues, or request discussion on traffic related matters.

Roads Service has made a number of recent improvements that impinge directly on traffic to and from the hospital, including the construction of slip roads from the hospital to the motorway and the provision of part-time traffic signals on the approach to the A26/M22 junction (Dunsilly roundabout), where queuing back onto the motorway was occurring. You will also be aware that a significant improvement scheme is currently being progressed to improve traffic flow on the M2 Ballymena by-pass at the Larne Road roundabout where the motorway is being extended under the roundabout to join up with the A26 Ballee Road West.

Roads Service staff are available to discuss traffic issues with representatives of the DHSSPS should an approach be made.

Roads Service Safer Roads

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the schools in the East Antrim constituency that have taken part in the Roads Service

Safer Roads to School Initiatives in the 2007/2008 academic year. (AQW 6133/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

There are a limited number of places available on the Travelwise Safer Routes to School Programme each year.

In the 2007/08 academic year, two schools in the East Antrim constituency, Carrickfergus Grammar and Carrickfergus College, have taken part in the Programme.

Senior Smartpass Holders

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage increase of journeys undertaken by senior Smartpass holders for each year since it was introduced in 2002. (AQW 6138/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	Senior SmartPass Journeys Undertaken	Percentage Increase (minus figures are shown in brackets)
2002-03	6,469,735	Not applicable
2003-04	7,477,619	15.6%
2004-05	7,633,437	2.1%
2005-06	7,585,338	(0.6%)
2006-07	7,720,354	1.8%
2007-08	8,213,819	6.4%

Senior Smartpass Holders

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage increase in first time senior Smart passes issued during each year since its introduction in 2002. (AQW 6139/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	First time Senior SmartPasses Issued	Percentage Increase (minus figures are shown in brackets)
2002-03	98,795	Not applicable
2003-04	14,966	(85%)
2004-05	10,735	(28%)
2005-06	11,412	6%

Financial Year	First time Senior SmartPasses Issued	Percentage Increase (minus figures are shown in brackets)
2006-07	12,902	13%
2007-08	14,957	16%

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of staff in his department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures.

(AQW 6145/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Within the Department for Regional Development, the figures^ for the period 8 May 2007 to 25 April 2008 inclusive are as follows:

Number of staff who have received official warnings:	79*
Number of staff who have faced disciplinary procedures:	14

Note: ^ These figures relate to written warnings only, as verbal warnings do not form part of the written personnel record and would only be retained locally by individual line managers

* In the case of 73 of these staff, the relevant warnings related to sickness absence.

Land Abandonment

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail why the objectors to the abandonment of a section of the Old Belfast Road, Bangor, were not provided with a report of the inquiry held on 27 and 28 June 2006.

(AQW 6149/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: It is normal practice for my Department's Roads Service to release the inspector's report to all objectors, and any person who appeared or was represented at the inquiry, when the Department formally announces its decision on the outcome of the inquiry. In relation to the proposed abandonment of land adjacent to 265 Old Belfast Road, Bangor, it is my Department's intention to make that announcement following receipt of the comments of the Assembly Departmental Committee.

Land Abandonment

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the correspondence with Hutchenson Partnership regarding the acquisition of land at the Old Belfast Road, Bangor.

(AQW 6150/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am advised that my Department's Roads Service

responded to the Hutchenson Partnership on 31 October 2003 about the potential disposal of land at Old Belfast Road, Bangor, outlining the need for the abandonment and highlighting, in general terms, the disposal procedures.

Sale of Land

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that if the land at the Old Belfast Road, Bangor, is to be abandoned, any sale will be widely advertised and put out to public tender.

(AQW 6151/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that any land offered for sale by my Department's Roads Service is subject to Government guidelines to ensure that the sale is fair and provides best value to the Department. Final decisions on the best method of sale are decided on a case by case basis in conjunction with Departmental Solicitors and Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Service. Whilst the disposal method for the site at Old Belfast Road, Bangor, has yet to be confirmed, it is likely that any sale will be advertised on the open market.

Springhill Shopping Centre

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide full details of the investigations carried out on the impact of redevelopment of Springhill Shopping Centre on traffic volumes and flow, as required by the inquiry on the abandonment of the open space at the Old Belfast Road, Bangor.

(AQW 6153/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that, in November 2005, my Department's Roads Service was consulted by Planning Service on a planning application to redevelop the then existing Springhill Shopping Centre. In order to assess the likely impact of traffic, generated by the application proposal, on the public road network, Roads Service requested the applicant to submit a Transport Assessment including a Traffic Impact Assessment. This was evaluated by Roads Service and found to be acceptable. The application was subsequently granted planning approval by Planning Service in June 2006.

In April 2007, Roads Service was consulted by Planning Service on a revised planning application to add mezzanine floors to the previously approved application. Again Roads Service requested a Transport Assessment, to take account of traffic generated by the original application together with the extra traffic that would be generated by the revised application. This further Assessment was evaluated by Roads Service and found to be acceptable.

In relation to the proposed abandonment of a portion of land adjacent to 265 Old Belfast Road, I am advised that the Transport Assessments carried out for the aforementioned planning applications, did not require the inclusion of this land in any road improvements associated with the shopping centre redevelopment proposals.

Springhill Shopping Centre

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development, in investigating the traffic flow at the new Springhill Shopping Centre, to confirm if account was taken of the increase in the size of the Tesco store and the newly submitted plans to add a mezzanine floor to the new units. (AQW 6158/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am advised that my Department's Roads Service was consulted by Planning Service with regard to the revised planning application and that, in reaching its decision, it took account of the increase in the size of the store and the plans to add a mezzanine floor to the new units.

A4 Road Works

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the amount of privately owned land that was purchased in the process of upgrading the A4 in the Dungannon area; and (ii) the cost of these acquisitions. (AQW 6201/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The A4 dualling between the M1 and Ballygawley and the improvement works at the A4 at Annaghilla and the A5 at Tullyvar, required the acquisition of a total of 253 hectares of private land, at an estimated cost of £23.5million.

The total area of land can be broken down as follows:

A4 Dualling	214 hectares
A4Annaghilla	24 hectares
A5 Tullyvar	15 hectares

Enterprise Rail Link

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if he will be seeking European funding for the development of the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise rail link. (AQW 6214/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As with any major project my Department will look to all available funding, including EU and make applications as appropriate in accordance with EU guidelines

Enterprise Rail Link

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if he will seek funding from every source possible to secure the future of the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise rail link. (AQW 6215/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the member to the answer I have given for AQW 6214/08.

Enterprise Rail Link

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if he is aware of planned investment in the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise rail link by the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and to detail this investment. (AQW 6216/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: A Business Case looking into improvements to, and the costs of, the Belfast to Dublin services is being jointly prepared by NIR and Iarnrod Eireann and will be considered at the North South Ministerial Committee meeting later this month.

Enterprise Rail Link

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the action he is taking to secure future investment for the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise link. (AQW 6217/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Programme for Government announced in January 2008 that planned capital investment in the Railways for the years 2008-11 would be in excess of £137m. In relation to the Belfast – Dublin line there are a number of major capital projects either under way or planned to improve services. Work started in February 2008 on a new £14.6m railway station at Newry and planning is underway to relay an 11 mile stretch of the track between Knockmore and Lurgan at a cost of £40m, with work programmed to start in 2009. In addition my Department recently approved a £950,000 capital programme to overhaul the Enterprise Trains; this entailed various engineering and safety measures along with a new corporate livery for the service.

Traffic Calming Measures at Movilla Road, Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to implement traffic calming measures outside Abbey Primary School, Newtownards, to enhance the safety of pupils of this school. (AQW 6234/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that during the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times, traffic on the Movilla Road has to travel slowly to negotiate cars parked outside the Abbey Primary School, Newtownards.

In view of this and the relatively good accident history at this location, Roads Service does not have any plans to implement traffic calming measures at this time.

Toome Bypass

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail why the Toome bypass needs resurfacing only four years after it was opened. (AQW 6273/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The carriageway surface on the Toome Bypass has performed significantly less well than expected and is being replaced, under warranty, by the bypass contractor.

Toome Bypass

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much the resurfacing of the Toome bypass will cost, and to outline who will pay for the forthcoming programme of works. (AQW 6274/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The bypass contractor will resurface the bypass under warranty, at no cost to the public purse.

Toome Bypass

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps that will be taken to ensure the new surface on the Toome bypass will last longer than the original surface, which is now in need of repair. (AQW 6276/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The bypass will be resurfaced using traditional hot rolled asphalt surface course and will be laid in accordance with current specifications and requirements.

Toome Bypass

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of the 'low noise' surface originally laid on the Toome bypass. (AQW 6279/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: While the proprietary 'noise-reduced' road surfacing used on the Toome Bypass has been used successfully elsewhere, it has performed significantly less well than expected on the Toome Bypass.

Car Clubs

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of the forthcoming launch of Northern Ireland's first ever car club and if he is aware of the success of this concept in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 6291/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Car clubs are regarded as a form of sustainable transport and are an effective tool in the campaign to reduce congestion and improve air quality.

I will be attending the launch of the Whizzgo Car Club initiative on 13 May 2008 and I am aware of the success of the car clubs run by a number of different operators in Britain.

Water Meters

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of abandoned or disused water meters in Newtownards. (AQW 6294/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that all water meters installed on customer supplies are used either for billing purposes or for monitoring purposes to assess demand in a particular area. NIW is not aware of any abandoned or disused water meters in Newtownards.

DRD Spending on Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much he spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008. (AQW 6318/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development spent £443,410 on publicity and advertising in 2007 – 2008.

Sewerage System

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail any plans to upgrade the sewerage system in Richill; and (ii) for his assessment of the adequacy of the sewerage system in Derryhale, given the increasing development in these areas. (AQW 6404/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a Drainage Area Study is currently well advanced for Richhill, which will assess the adequacy of the sewerage system in the area and identify parts of the system that need to be upgraded. The sewer improvement recommendations resulting from the Study will be prioritised by NIW and included in its capital works programme. However, due to competing priorities, it is unlikely that any improvements could commence before 2011.

Small catchments such as Derryhale are not included in the major drainage area study programme, but are assessed on an individual basis. These assessments take into account the existing capacity of the sewerage network and future projected requirements, including development plans for the area. In the case of Derryhale, an assessment found that the sewerage system is operating effectively and the capacity of the network in the area is adequate.

Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is being given to allow people to have water meters installed and to allow metering to form part of their water bill.
(AQW 6469/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services commissioned by the Executive provided an overall set of proposals for domestic water and sewerage payments including the suggestion that there should be no further action taken on metering until and unless a policy of universal domestic metering is introduced. They also recommended that the installation of metering facilities in new buildings could continue to advance the provision of universal metering at some point in the future.

These points are currently under consideration and the Executive will decide the way forward on metering and other recommendations of the Independent Review Panel's Strand 2 report. It will then consult on its proposals.

Ulsterbus Goldline Express

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 12 months, the number of passengers using Ulsterbus Goldline Express services between Randalstown and Belfast.
(AQW 6489/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised that a total of 13,438 passenger trips were made on Ulsterbus Service 210 between Randalstown and Belfast during the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. Details of each month's trips are outlined in the table below.

Month	Number of trips
April 2007	1,207
May 2007	1,326
June 2007	1,197
July 2007	787
August 2007	825
September 2007	1,238
October 2007	1,227
November 2007	1,092
December 2007	1,096
January 2008	1,127
February 2008	1,186
March 2008	1,130

Ulsterbus Goldline Express

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reasons why Ulsterbus Goldline Express services between Randalstown and Belfast have been reduced.
(AQW 6491/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been informed by Translink that as part of the Ulsterbus Strategic Review, changes were made to the Goldline service that links Randalstown to Belfast. These changes involve substituting off-peak Goldline services with a service that stops more frequently. The Ulsterbus Strategic Review was undertaken to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and integration of Ulsterbus services

The Independent Water Review Panel

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost of the Independent Water Review Panel, from its establishment until 28 April 2008.
(AQW 6534/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Independent Water Review Panel was appointed in June 2007 and since that date it incurred expenditure of £378,482 for Panel member's fees and expenses, salary costs of support staff and general running costs including consultancy support.

Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if he will undertake to establish an Output Monitoring Group, as per paragraph 5.21 of the Strand Two Report by the Independent Water Review Panel. (AQW 6536/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

This issue is currently under consideration and the Executive will decide the way forward on this and other recommendations of the Independent Review's Strand 2 report.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Supported Living Schemes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how much has been committed

to Supported Living Schemes for the 2008/2009 financial year. (AQW 5782/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):

I have provided £61m to the Supporting People revenue budget for the 2008/2009 financial year.

Supported Housing Schemes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Supported Housing Schemes she will make available this year, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 5783/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not readily available by parliamentary constituency. I have however set out by District Council area in the following table those supported housing schemes which are planned to start in 2008. I have taken Supported Housing to mean that which is specially designed, managed or adapted to meet the needs of people for whom standard housing is unsuitable or inappropriate.

District Council Area	Housing Association	Support Provider	Scheme Name	Client Group	Units
Newry	Habinteg	Southern Health & Social Care Trust	Patrick Street/Needham	Learning Disabilities	2
Carrickfergus	Oaklee	Northern Health & Social Care Trust	Ellis Street	Learning Disabilities	6
Antrim	Oaklee	Oaklee	Oriel	Learning Disabilities	3
Belfast	Oaklee	St John of God	143 Glen Road (Rehab)	Learning Disabilities	2
Craigavon	Ulidia	Southern Health & Social Care Trust	1 Bowens Close	Learning Disabilities	3
Down	Oaklee	Autism Initiatives	Ruby House	Learning Disabilities	11
Carrickfergus	BIH	Cithra Foundation	Victoria Street, Carrickfergus	Domestic Violence	5
Lisburn	Trinity	Praxis	St Pauls	Dementia	8
Newry	BIH	Southern Health & Social Care Trust	Father Cullen / Ardaveen Park	Learning Disabilities	12
Fermanagh	Fold	To be decided	Castlecoole Road	Homeless	11
Lisburn	Triangle	Positive Futures	Ballymacoss Central Ph 3	Learning Disabilities	10
Belfast	Oaklee	East Belfast Mission	Hosford House	Homeless	4
Craigavon	South Ulster	Praxis	Thomas Street, Portadown	Mental Health	12
Dungannon	BIH	De Paul Trust	Castlehill Market Square	Homeless	22

In addition existing schemes at Hollybank in Magherafelt for the mental health client group are being restructured and will provide 12 places. The support provider is the Northern Health & Social Care Trust.

Eastvale Avenue Housing Estate

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 15 years, (i) her department's expenditure on Eastvale Avenue housing estate, Dungannon; and (ii) how this compares with expenditure on estates of a similar size in the Dungannon area. (AQW 5809/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below shows the total amount of Housing Executive expenditure on planned schemes for the last 15 years in the Eastvale area of Dungannon.

The remaining tables detail the expenditure levels for similar sized estates in the Dungannon area.

EASTVALE ESTATE 26 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme Type	Average unit cost	Total cost
October 1994	Heating replacement	N/A	£ 91,051.00
April 1997	External Cyclical Maintenance (ECM)	£ 3,690.00	£ 95,940.00
November 2004	ECM	£ 1,362.00	£ 35,412.00
Total spend			£ 222,403.00

DATA HELD ON ESTATES OF A SIMILAR SIZE TO EASTVALE: VICTORIA WAY 20 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme Type	Average unit cost	Total cost
April 1997	ECM	£ 3690.00	£ 73,800.00
November 2002	ECM	£ 1664.00	£ 33,280.00
Total spend			£ 107,080.00

DUNLEA VALE 28 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme Type	Average unit cost	Total cost
March 1993	Heating replacement	N/A	£ 63,565.00
March 2005	Kitchen replacement	£ 4788.00	£ 134,064.00
November 1997	ECM	£ 2069.00	£ 57,932.00
January 2003	ECM	£ 1139.00	£ 31,892.00

Date	Scheme Type	Average unit cost	Total cost
Total spend			£ 287,453.00

MOYGASHEL PARK 26 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme Type	Average unit cost	Total Cost
March 1996	Single Element Scheme	£ 7466.00	£ 194,116.00
January 1994	ECM	£ 1973.00	£ 51,298.00
November 1998	ECM	£ 1897.00	£ 49,322.00
October 2005	ECM	£ 3107.00	£ 80,782.00
Total spend			£ 375,518.00

SPRINGDALE ESTATE 27 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme type	Average unit cost	Total Cost
June 2004	Heating replacement	N/A	£ 81,481.00
April 1997	ECM	£ 3690.00	£ 99,630.00
November 2004	ECM	£ 1362.00	£ 36,774.00
Total			£ 217,885.00

NEVILLE DRIVE/TERRACE 19 NIHE OWNED PROPERTIES

Date	Scheme type	Average unit cost	Total Cost
January 1994	ECM	£ 1973.00	£ 37,487.00
November 1998	ECM	£ 1897.00	£ 36,043.00
October 2005	ECM	£ 3107.00	£ 59,033.00
Total			£ 132,563.00

Note:

1. External cyclical maintenance and kitchen schemes are generally programmed on a cyclical basis. Improvement schemes are programmed on the basis of age and condition.

Housing Executive

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in the Cookstown District Council area, broken down by house type. (AQW 5821/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive had the following

stock in the Cookstown District Council area at March 2008.

	Bung- alow	Flat	House	Maison- ette	Cottage	Total
Stock	214	130	684	12	12	1052

Housing Executive

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in the Magherafelt District Council area, broken down by house type.
(AQW 5822/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive had the following stock in the Magherafelt District Council area at March 2008.

	Bung- alow	Flat	House	Maison- ette	Cottage	Total
Stock	513	112	644	10	30	1309

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the obligations to be placed on estate agents when mandatory energy performance certificates are introduced.
(AQW 5831/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The introduction of Energy Performance Certificates does not place any obligations on estate agents.

Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on the progress of the proposed Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme.
(AQW 5851/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Preparations for the Multi Element Improvement scheme to 54 properties at an estimated cost of £2.25m are progressing satisfactorily and the scheme is currently programmed to commence in November 2008.

Housing Executive

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the guidance her department has given the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to the purchase of properties, currently for

sale on the open market, to be used for social housing.
(AQW 5854/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Association Guide enables Housing Associations to acquire new dwellings as “off the shelf” purchases or existing dwellings under the “Existing Satisfactory Purchase Scheme”. The benefit of these procurement options is that dwellings can be acquired and occupied quickly. The disadvantage is that they are likely to fall short of the Department’s standards and more expensive than houses built in the traditional manner. In terms of the 2007/08 social housing development programme the Housing Executive was advised that the priority was to achieve the annual starts target within the budget available and secure best value for money.

Rural Proofing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail her plans to ensure that all departmental policies are rural-proofed.
(AQW 5868/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Ensuring that the development and implementation of policy takes account of the particular needs and circumstances of people in rural areas is already an important issue for my department. The Department of Agricultural and Rural Development is also currently leading on work to enhance the rural- proofing process. My Department will take account of the recommendations coming out of that work, which is being taken forward under the Programme for Government Public Services Agreement 17 and which is due to conclude at the end of 2008.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people who have lost entitlement to disability living allowance over the last 6 months, in comparison to the previous 6 months.
(AQW 5891/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

	Total Number of Decisions	Entitlement Ended *
October 2007 – March 2008	19,508	3016
April 2007 – September 2007	18,879	2441

* It is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown of the specific reasons as to why these customers are no longer entitled to the benefit. Typically these circumstances could include change of circumstances, death, expiry of award and review by the Agency.

Housing Executive

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive allocations in (i) Groomsport; (ii) Rathgill; (iii) Willowbank/Balloo; (iv) Breezemount/Conlig; (v) Whitehill; (vi) Kilcooley; (vii) Bloomfield; (viii) Crawfordsburn; (ix) Helen's Bay; (x) Holywood; (xi) Donaghadee; (xii) Millisle; and (xiii) any other area in the North Down constituency. (AQW 5920/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not held in the precise format requested. The following table details all allocations from the common waiting list whether by the Housing Executive or Housing Associations.

Area	Year to December 2005	Year to December 2006	Year to December 2007
Groomsport	4	1	8
Bloomfield Road/Balloo	46	33	41
Conlig	11	8	13
Whitehill	22	14	21
Kilcooley	1	1	8
Crawfordsburn	0	0	2
Helen's Bay	1	1	6
Holywood Central			
Spencer Street	7	10	14
Strand	3	0	4
Woodlands	1	2	1
Holywood Outer			
Redburn	3	3	6
Loughview/White City	23	32	19
Donaghadee	25	38	37
Millisle	6	14	9
Other:			
Bangor			
Skipperstown/Tughan Court	6	12	10
Bangor Central	21	17	19
Clandeboyne Road	6	0	1
Clanmorris	0	0	1
Bangor East			

Area	Year to December 2005	Year to December 2006	Year to December 2007
Churchill	0	3	1
Donaghadee Road	9	9	10

Common Housing Selection Scheme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the point system that is used in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to allocate homes. (AQW 5949/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The primary principle of the current Common Housing Selection Scheme, which was introduced in November 2000 following extensive consultation, is the recognition that priority for housing is relative to need. This is established by the award of points that take into account many material factors.

Feedback from applicants and tenants confirms high levels of satisfaction with the Scheme in relation to its aim of ensuring that those in most need are ranked highest on the Waiting List.

Youth Workers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of youth workers based in West Belfast who are funded by her department; and (ii) the organisations in which these youth workers are based. (AQW 5962/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department, through its Belfast Regeneration Office, currently supports 9 youth worker posts in the West Belfast parliamentary constituency. The posts are funded under the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Details of each are provided in the following table:

Organisation	No. of Posts	Description
Upper Springfield Development Co. Ltd (Ballymurphy Intervention Project)	5	1 Full-time Youth Co-ordinator
		4 Part-time Youth Workers
Blackmountain Action Group	1	1 Full-time Youth Worker
Streetbeat Youth Project	1	1 Full-time Youth Worker
Stadium Youth & Community Project	2	2 Full-time Youth Workers

DSD Funding for Counselling Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the groups funded by her department to provide counselling within the community and voluntary sector; and (ii) the specific function (e.g. suicide prevention, drug counselling) these groups are funded to provide. (AQW 6047/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the information requested.

TABLE – ORGANISATIONS PRESENTLY FUNDED BY DSD TO PROVIDE COUNSELLING

Name of organisation (i)	Specific Function (ii)
Cancerlifecycle	Counselling cancer patients/families during and after illness
New Life Counselling	Counselling for youth, Adults and therapeutic Counsellor
Ardoyne Women's Group	Counselling with regard to Alcohol, Drugs and Suicide
North Belfast Women's Initiative and Support Group	Counselling with regard to alcohol, drugs, prescription medication and stress
Good Morning Ballysillan	Counselling to Senior Citizens regarding health matters, safety issues etc
Tar Isteach	Counselling to ex prisoners and their families
Benview Community Group	Counselling to teenagers through schools
Forum for Action on Substance Abuse	Drug / Alcohol misuse, suicide and self-harm
Ashfield Boys High School	Counselling to pupils covering behavioural and emotional problems
Community Drugs Awareness	Training in Drug Awareness, Counselling, Parenting Skills and techniques to combat substance misuse
Windsor Women	Stress Therapy, Drug and Alcohol Abuse Counselling, Refuge and Advice to Women and Children of Abuse
Corpus Christi Services	Mental Health Counselling
WHSSB - The Nexus Institute	Sexual Abuse & Rape Counselling Services.
Centre of Creative Energy	Providing a Centre Co-ordinator to facilitate the promotion of positive mental health.
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	Community drugs and alcohol project.

This table provides details of the groups presently funded by DSD through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy to provide counselling services. In line with my announcement of 10 March 2008 regarding future

Neighbourhood Renewal funding arrangements, support will be provided through to March 2009 to a range of projects that are the statutory responsibility of other Government Departments. Officials are currently involved in discussions with other Departmental and statutory agency representatives regarding potential future funding arrangements, beyond the current 2008/09 financial year.

DSD Funding for Counselling Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the groups currently funded by her department to provide counselling within the community and voluntary sector, who will no longer receive funding in the 2009/2010 financial year.

(AQW 6049/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the information requested.

TABLE – ORGANISATIONS PRESENTLY FUNDED BY DSD TO PROVIDE COUNSELLING

Name of organisation (i)	Specific Function (ii)
Cancerlifecycle	Counselling cancer patients/families during and after illness
New Life Counselling	Counselling for youth, Adults and therapeutic Counsellor
Ardoyne Women's Group	Counselling with regard to Alcohol, Drugs and Suicide
North Belfast Women's Initiative and Support Group	Counselling with regard to alcohol, drugs, prescription medication and stress
Good Morning Ballysillan	Counselling to Senior Citizens regarding health matters, safety issues etc
Tar Isteach	Counselling to ex prisoners and their families
Benview Community Group	Counselling to teenagers through schools
Forum for Action on Substance Abuse	Drug / Alcohol misuse, suicide and self-harm
Ashfield Boys High School	Counselling to pupils covering behavioural and emotional problems
Community Drugs Awareness	Training in Drug Awareness, Counselling, Parenting Skills and techniques to combat substance misuse
Windsor Women	Stress Therapy, Drug and Alcohol Abuse Counselling, Refuge and Advice to Women and Children of Abuse
Corpus Christi Services	Mental Health Counselling
WHSSB - The Nexus Institute	Sexual Abuse & Rape Counselling Services.

Name of organisation (i)	Specific Function (ii)
Centre of Creative Energy	Providing a Centre Co-ordinator to facilitate the promotion of positive mental health.
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	Community drugs and alcohol project.

This table provides details of the groups presently funded by DSD through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy to provide counselling services. In line with my announcement of 10 March 2008 regarding future Neighbourhood Renewal funding arrangements, support will be provided through to March 2009 to a range of projects that are the statutory responsibility of other Government Departments. Officials are currently involved in discussions with other Departmental and statutory agency representatives regarding potential future funding arrangements, beyond the current 2008/09 financial year.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently claiming incapacity benefit, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6057/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the Table below. The figures show the number of claims for Incapacity Benefit where either an amount of Incapacity Benefit was in payment, or National Insurance credits only were awarded, at 5 April 2008.

INCAPACITY BENEFIT CLAIMANTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AT 5 APRIL 2008

Belfast East	4,692
Belfast North	8,464
Belfast South	4,949
Belfast West	9,406
East Antrim	4,618
East Londonderry	5,630
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5,477
Foyle	9,917
Lagan Valley	4,783
Mid Ulster	6,166
Newry and Armagh	7,461
North Antrim	6,120
North Down	3,651
South Antrim	4,928
South Down	6,876
Strangford	5,053
Upper Bann	7,691

Belfast East	4,692
West Tyrone	7,391
Unallocated Postcodes*	942
Total Claimants	114,215

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Electoral Wards and Council areas on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward or council using this method and some cannot be allocated at all.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development if she was aware of funding restrictions within the Co-ownership scheme before or at the time she made her Ministerial statement on 26 February 2008. (AQW 6092/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have given Co-ownership at the start of this year, a grant of £15m, which will help 500 people onto the first rung of the housing ladder. Since I came into office, funding for co-ownership has increased significantly and I am very much on course to achieve the goals set out in my New Housing Agenda

Council District

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5445/08, to provide a breakdown by council district area of the £15 million. (AQW 6093/08)

The Minister for Social Development: £15m has been allocated to Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) this year. I am unable to provide a breakdown of how the grant will be allocated.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm whether this financial year's funding of £15 million for new co-ownership customers has already been allocated to existing customers, and whether funding is still available for those who may wish to take advantage of the co-ownership scheme this year. (AQW 6094/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Co-ownership's scheme started this year with a grant of £15m, which will help 500 people onto the first rung of the housing ladder. The Co-ownership scheme has already received more than enough applications to use up this year's overall funding and achieve the targets set out in the Programme for Government

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5272/08, to clarify what her statement “no new applications to purchase with co-ownership possible at this time” means for potential co-ownership customers this year. (AQW 6095/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association who administer the co-ownership scheme announced on 18 March 2008 that it would be unable to accept any further applications due to demand outstripping available resources. The Association will use the £15 million grant from Government along with external finance to achieve the Programme for Government target of 500 applicants this year. It is not possible to say when the Association may be in a position to accept further applications. I will continue to explore ways of delivering more affordable housing.

Official Meetings

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development if she has met with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, as she indicated in a recent Assembly debate; and to detail the topics discussed at, and outcomes of, this meeting. (AQW 6101/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The agenda for the meeting will include discussion of the report from the Alcohol Advisory Group which my counterpart, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, commissioned to look at sale and consumption of alcohol in the South. The report was published on 23 April and a suitable date for a detailed meeting is now being arranged. I have already had initial discussions regarding this issue with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the South of Ireland.

Underage and Public Drinking

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development if she has raised the issue of underage and public drinking with either the Ministerial Sub-group on Children and Young People or with Executive Ministers. (AQW 6102/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I raised the issue of underage and public drinking with the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People which involves all Executive Ministers. I also drew it to the attention of the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey MLA. In response the Sub-Committee

considered the issues at its meeting on 10 April during which I again addressed the topic.

Liquor Licensing Laws

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update and timescale on taking forward the recommendations on liquor licensing laws. (AQW 6103/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I wrote to you on 24 April 2008 replying to a similar request which you made during the Private Members’ Motion on underage drinking on 1 April. A copy of my letter has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Urban Regeneration

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the action she is taking to promote urban regeneration in Carrickfergus and Larne town centres. (AQW 6110/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In both towns I have agreed to fund town centre Masterplans which will identify how the full regeneration potential of the town centres can be realised. I anticipate that the masterplans will be completed before the end of this year

Draft Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many of the 5,200 new homes referred to in her recent statement, will be built in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6113/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The draft Social Housing Development Programme makes provision for a total of 90 new dwellings in East Antrim in the next three years. The full five year draft programme can be accessed on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s website at www.nihe.gov.uk

DSD Spend on EQIA and Consultations

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of money her department has spent on (i) equality impact assessments; and (ii) consultations, over the last three years. (AQW 6115/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Information is not available on the precise costs of Equality Impact Assessments because they are carried out as part of my Department’s normal policy-making

process and information on cost is not collected separately..

The table below sets out the total cost of consultations carried out by my Department in the last three financial years.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Consultation Costs	£24,527.87	£60,083.28	£103,192.22

Co-Ownership Schemes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of applications for co-ownership schemes awaiting a response; and to advise how she proposes to respond to these applications. (AQW 6178/08)

The Minister for Social Development: So far this year 83 households have been assisted through the Co-ownership scheme which is operated by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA). There are a further 213 applications to which NICHHA are contractually committed and are awaiting completion. In addition there are another 284 applications to be processed. NICHHA will use the £15m grant funding from the Department and external finance to assist 500 people in line with the Programme for Government target.

Housing Executive Expenditure

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 15 years, her department's expenditure on each Northern Ireland Housing Executive estate in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 6204/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information requested is not readily available, either in the detailed geographical form or for the period requested. However, the following information outlines the Housing Executive's expenditure within three of its Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle District office areas which comprise the North Antrim constituency.

BALLYMENA

Year	Expenditure £m
2001/02	5.4
2002/03	6.6
2003/04	7.6
2004/05	6.3
2005/06	7.7

Year	Expenditure £m
2006/07	6.9
2007/08	5.2

BALLYMONEY

Year	Expenditure £m
2001/02	3.9
2002/03	4.16
2003/04	4.5
2004/05	3.2
2005/06	2.1
2006/07	3.0
2007/08	2.8

MOYLE

Year	Expenditure £m
2001/02	2.1
2002/03	2.5
2003/04	2.3
2004/05	3.9
2005/06	2.7
2006/07	2.4
2007/08	1.9

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how the Urban Renewal Area status is being progressed in the Upper Long Streets of the New Lodge area in North Belfast. (AQW 6266/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is reappraising the area in the light of changing market conditions and plans in adjacent areas. When this report is available it will be considered by the Housing Executive and subsequently discussed with my Department.

Renewing Communities Fund

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how Renewing Communities funds are being delivered in North Belfast; and (ii) the groups receiving funding. (AQW 6268/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department had responsibility for co-ordinating the

Renewing Communities action plan for this cross-departmental funding programme which ran for 2 years from 2006 to 2008. Funding for the Renewing Communities programme came to an end on 31st March 2008 as there was no centrally designated budget available to continue after that date.

Social Security Agency

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on the Strategic Business Review for the Social Security Agency. (AQW 6282/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency is carrying out a Strategic Business Review to determine how best to deliver services via its network of local offices in the future. A number of options for a new service delivery model have been identified and each of these is currently subject to economic appraisal in the Outline Business Case (OBC) in order to identify a preferred model. It is anticipated that the OBC will be referred to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for approval in late June 2008. Until approved, the Agency does not have an agreed service delivery model that can be used as a firm basis for public consultation. The response from DFP is expected in late July/early August 2008 following which an 8-12 week period of public consultation will commence.

Off-Road Bikes

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5829/08, to detail the number of complaints received by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to off-road bikes, broken down by Housing Executive District. (AQW 6289/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not available. The Housing Executive cannot disaggregate its figures on anti social behaviour, to identify only those involving off-road vehicles.

Heating Replacement Programme

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps her department is taking to (i) replace Economy 7 heating; and (ii) glass fronted fires, in Northern Ireland Housing Executive dwellings. (AQW 6292/08)

The Minister for Social Development: 70% of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's tenanted stock has already been upgraded to oil or natural gas

heating systems. The heating replacement programme primarily targets solid fuel roomheaters, but Economy 7 has also been included in relevant schemes.

In the current financial year it is proposed to upgrade a further 2,300 dwellings to natural gas, where available, or oil.

Ligoniel Improvement Association

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to provide details of how her Department is intending to respond to the current crisis for Ligoniel Improvement Association; and will the Minister bring forward arrangements that will protect the job losses and services to that community. (AQW 6392/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The member will be aware that a PSNI investigation is currently ongoing and it would be improper to comment on the detail of this, pending the outcome. Until the outcome of this is known, I cannot give any assurances on job losses. I can, however, assure the member that my Department will seek to protect the employment of staff where we are able to do so.

Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if there are sufficient funds to complete all applications for Co-ownership which were registered before the announcement that the scheme was to be suspended. (AQW 6444/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association who administer the co-ownership scheme announced on 18 March 2008 that it would be unable to accept any further applications due to demand outstripping available resources. The Association will use the £15 million grant from Government along with external finance to achieve the Programme for Government target of 500 applicants this year. It is not possible to say when the Association may be in a position to accept further applications. I will continue to explore ways of delivering more affordable housing.

Areas at Risk Programme

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development who will be responsible for allocation and control of any funding from her department in relation to the 'Areas at Risk' project to be

implemented in the Lisanally/Alexander areas of Armagh city. (AQW 6473/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Allocation of funding under the Areas at Risk Programme is dependent on the needs identified within the participant community following an independent community audit of the area. All funding is directly managed and administered by officials in the Voluntary and Community Unit of my department

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 9 May 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Post-Primary Transfer

Mr Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the discussions the Executive has had in relation to the post-primary transfer proposals. (AQW 3693/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): The Executive has, on a number of occasions, discussed the process for consideration of post primary transfer proposals. It is intended that the issue will be discussed by the Executive on 15 May.

Victims and Survivors

Mr Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its plans to introduce legislation to amend the definition of 'victim' in existing legislation for victims and survivors. (AQW 5524/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have agreed that we will ask the proposed new forum for Victims and Survivors to examine the issues around the definition of victim and make recommendations.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on any further representations it has made since January 2008 in relation to the pension provision for former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve, arising out of the debate in the Assembly on 26 June 2007. (AQW 5571/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We refer the Member to previous answers to Mr David McNarry and Dr Stephen Farry which were printed in the Answer booklets on Friday 18 January and Friday 14 March 2008.

We have contacted the NIO again on this matter. We continue to await their response.

Staff Absence

Dr McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in the department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6191/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The total number of staff absent due to stress during the last 5 financial years was 32. The table below sets out the detail; however, the breakdown by grade has not been included, as to do so, could identify individuals.

Financial Year	Number of days absence	Number of Staff
2003/04	15-19days	1
	25-29 days	1
	40 plus days	3
Sub-total		5 Staff
2004/05	5-9 days	1
	40 days plus	2
Sub-total		3 staff
2005/06	5-9days	1
	15-19 days	2
	30-34 days	1
	40 plus	4
Sub-total		8 staff
2006/07	5-9	2
	15-19	1
	20-24	1
	40 plus	1
Sub-total		5 staff
2007/08	5-9	2
	10-14	1

Financial Year	Number of days absence	Number of Staff
	15-19	1
	20-24	1
	25-29	3
	35-39	1
	40 plus	2
Sub-total		11 staff

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the targets set by their department in relation to the employment of people with disabilities over the next five years.
(AQW 6192/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
Rather than setting goals or targets for the employment of people with disabilities, the NICS is committed to ensuring that its employment policies and practices provide people with disabilities with an equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the NICS.

The NICS continues to work with people with disabilities and their representatives to identify proactive measures to encourage people with disabilities to consider a career in the NICS and, when appointed, to remove any barriers to their retention and progression within the Service. And, whether or not staff declare they have a disability for monitoring purposes, Departments will make reasonable adjustments across the range of employment practices including, recruitment and selection, training and development, and working arrangements, to ensure people with disabilities are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled people.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of staff who have been authorised to work from home since May 2007.
(AQW 6219/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
As a major employer the NICS has for many years recognised the benefits that both individuals and the organisation can realise by enabling staff to have a flexible approach to their working day. Staff and managers work positively together to meet the challenge of ensuring that the needs of the individual and the business are met through a flexible working regime.

Approximately 20 members of staff have been given authorisation to work from home since May 2007. This includes regular authorised home-working arrangements as well as occasional and one-off requests to facilitate personal circumstances of staff concerned where the request meets business needs.

Disadvantaged Children

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what roles they intend to play to ensure that the interests of the most disadvantaged children are effectively addressed by the Executive.
(AQW 6382/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
There are several ways in which the Executive will ensure that the interests of the most disadvantaged children are effectively addressed. One of the most important being the targets reflected within its Programme for Government 2008-11 which commits to:

- work toward the elimination of child poverty in Northern Ireland by 2020 and reducing child poverty by 50% by 2010; and
- work toward the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012.

Additionally, in line with its statutory obligation under Section 28e of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Executive Committee will soon receive proposals for the adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here, based on objective need.

Once the strategy has been adopted, the Executive will be asked to consider existing and new targets that will contribute to the Programme for Government targets. In doing so, it will take account of the findings and recommendations coming out of the current enquiry on child poverty being carried out by the OFMDFM Committee.

Account will also be given to the OFMDFM departmental work conducted on tackling disadvantage and barriers experienced by lone parents and people with disabilities, which is nearing completion.

The Junior Ministers chair the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People which has recently identified a number of key priorities. These include a specific focus on child poverty, vulnerable young people and children with a disability or mental health condition.

The Ministerial Sub Committee provides a platform on which these issues can be taken forward in a co-ordinated manner and effectively addressed by the Executive.

In order to ensure that we are addressing and meeting the needs of all children and young people, including the most disadvantaged, we need to hear from young people directly about key issues affecting their lives.

OFMDFM currently funds the Participation Network which can be accessed as a means of engaging children and young people on a range of issues.

Most recently the Junior Ministers attended a youth forum hearing organised by Save the Children at which the Ministers listened to the issues raised by the young people. They gave their commitment to consider the issues raised by the group and report back.

Business Class Flights

Mr Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of times that deputy First Minister McGuinness and Junior Minister Kelly have flown business class in their capacity as Ministers since assuming office in May 2007; and (ii) the cost incurred by the OFMDFM for this travel, and to confirm if flying business class is standard practice or whether the Ministers are given the option of flying business class. (AQW 6390/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Business class flights are generally booked for Ministerial travel to ensure flights are fully refundable, reducing the risk of loss of funds through cancellation to allow for maximum flexibility as Ministers' diaries are frequently subject to last minute changes and to facilitate work on Ministerial papers during travel.

The deputy First Minister has flown business class on official business seven times since 8 May 2007 incurring a total cost of £13,540.30. Junior Minister Kelly has flown business class on official business six times since 8 May 2007, totalling a cost of £5,678.56 and €520.28.

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the contact that Junior Minister Kelly made with party leaders on Tuesday 22 April 2008 in relation to the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill was done on behalf of the OFMDFM. (AQW 6391/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Junior Minister Kelly contacted party leaders by telephone on 22 April in his capacity as a Junior Minister in OFMDFM.

Paramilitary Flags

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail, for each of the last 2 years, the numbers of (i) paramilitary flags; (ii) murals; and (iii) sectarian graffiti, in each parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6424/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The information is provided in the following table.

Parliamentary Constituency	Paramilitary Flags				Murals				Sectarian Graffiti			
	2006		2007		2006		2007		2006		2007	
	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept
Belfast East	12	7	14	4	10	11	13	6	0	3	0	0
Belfast North	20	19	15	7	27	27	24	25	2	2	2	2
Belfast South	15	15	31	4	10	10	10	2	0	1	3	5
Belfast West	11	16	17	11	13	14	10	10	0	3	4	4
East Antrim	10	0	3	0	2	2	7	6	3	3	5	3
East Londonderry	6	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foyle	12	7	12	8	8	15	4	4	2	4	4	4
Lagan Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	3
Mid Ulster	4	2	4	5	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	0

Parliamentary Constituency	Paramilitary Flags				Murals				Sectarian Graffiti			
	2006		2007		2006		2007		2006		2007	
	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept	July	Sept
Newry & Armagh	6	8	11	9	8	7	1	1	3	1	7	5
North Antrim	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	2	2
North Down	1	0	3	3	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
South Antrim	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Down	12	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Strangford	17	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Upper Bann	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1	0	4	3
Total	133	89	115	53	84	91	79	64	14	20	35	31

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Gortin Glen Forest Park

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plans to upgrade public amenities, including disabled areas and eating areas, at the Gortin Glen Forest Park. (AQW 6169/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Gortin Glen Forest Park facilitates a wide range of recreation pursuits including walking, pony-trekking and cycling. A 5-mile scenic drive offers those less able the opportunity to experience the wider forest environment and spectacular views of the surrounding area.

A classroom and picnic tables provide informal eating facilities and these have been upgraded recently to allow access for the less able-bodied. A ramp has been installed to link the classroom to outside areas.

Options are also being considered to further improve facilities, particularly the toilets, to a standard appropriate to the level of usage.

In line with the Forest Service strategy for sustainability and growth, the potential for partnership arrangements will also be explored with other organisations, to identify opportunities to improve the quality of services and visitor experiences.

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much her

department has spent on equality impact assessments and consultations over the last three years.

(AQW 6175/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Over the last 3 years my Department has carried out Equality Impact Assessments and consultations on policies relating to the Drainage Infrastructure Charging Policy Development, Fisheries Policy, DARD aspects of the PfG, and the Rural Development Programme (2007-2013). The total costs for the EQIAs and related consultations amounts to £24,250.08.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the targets set by her department in relation to the employment of people with disabilities over the next five years.

(AQW 6193/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: This Department does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Migrant Workers

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any implications for migrant workers following the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board.

(AQW 6198/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Board protects the rights of agricultural workers in the areas of wages and holiday entitlement. For example the Board sets six 'agricultural minimum

rates of pay' only the lowest of which is equal to the National Minimum Wage. The remaining rates are set higher than the National Minimum Wage to encourage workers to join the agricultural industry and to retain the workers we already have in the industry. In certain circumstances the Board allows for a greater holiday entitlement than that provided under the Working Time legislation. Abolition of the Board will remove these entitlements so worsening the employment conditions of workers in Agriculture, including migrant workers.

In addition, the Agri-food sector has used the Board's "Standard Rate" as a benchmark for pay awards. Significant numbers of migrants are employed in the Agri-food sector and they would be disadvantaged by the loss of the Board's rate which could leave the lower NMW rate as the benchmark.

The abolition of the Board will leave Agricultural workers, including migrants, at a disadvantage when compared to workers elsewhere on these islands as workers elsewhere will continue to enjoy the protection of an Agricultural Wages Board. We should not allow the exploitation of workers, and this is particularly important at a time of significant influx of migrant workers.

Farm Animals

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of people who, since June 1998, have been banned by the courts from keeping farm animals. (AQW 6228/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since 1999, the DARD Veterinary Service Central Enforcement Team (CET) has maintained a Register of disqualified people arising from DARD prosecutions under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972. This Register records 28 people disqualified through DARD and PSNI prosecutions for periods ranging from 1 year to life.

Cod Fishing Industry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of (i) the recent European Union proposals to amend the cod recovery plan; and (ii) the effect of further closures on the recovery of the local cod fishing industry. (AQW 6229/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

(i) The main proposals that affect us include:-

- Fishing effort to be managed to meet a mortality target rather than a stock biomass target;
- For stocks in poor condition, the Total Allowable Catch will also be adjusted in line with the adjustment in effort;
- Member States will be given a "pot" of effort that they can manage themselves, and can reallocate extra days to vessels undertaking cod conservation measures;

Some of these proposals are welcome, such as the flexibility for the member state to reallocate days, but other areas still need further clarification with the Commission on how they would work in practice. For example, it is not yet clear how the desire to meet mortality targets will affect the Total Allowable Catch. In addition the same mortality target is proposed for all sea areas and we want the Commission to explain the justification for this. Finally there is an implication that effort could no longer be transferred between sea areas and this would be a further unwelcome restriction.

- (ii) It is likely that as long as cod stocks in the Irish Sea remain depleted, the Commission will continue to restrict the activity of vessels that target cod until stocks recover. However we will be discussing with industry representatives how the flexibility to manage our own days at sea can be used to our best advantage.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff in her department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6307/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There is no formal home working policy within the NICS or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

All DARD staff are office-based. However, in a number of cases there can be short term local arrangements e.g. inspectors may not attend their office location regularly, depending upon circumstances.

The Department does not hold any central figures on home working.

Rural Communities

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to support development for children and young people living in rural communities. (AQW 6308/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Following my appointment as Minister, I asked my Department to establish a Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group to report on the difficulties facing childcare in rural areas and to make recommendations on how current and future provision could be improved. I received their report on the 23 April 2008 and it is now my intention that a Rural Childcare Programme is developed and that this will be funded from the rural anti-poverty and social exclusion funds secured following the budget 07 exercise. My Department will be working with the Group and others to identify what might be in the programme and how it fits with the work of other Departments and public bodies in this area.

In addition under the Axis 3, 'Quality of life' measures of the NIRD 2007-13, all Joint Council Clusters working in partnership with Local Action Groups will be required to make the needs of children and young people a key criterion to be addressed within their local rural development strategy. In this regard submitted strategies must be informed by A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in NI 2006-2016. It is expected that at least 5%, amounting to approximately £5million, of the total programme funding, will be devoted to projects focussed on addressing the needs of children and young people. This requirement has been stressed to the Council Clusters and I look forward to the innovative actions that will be proposed for children and young people as part of their Rural Development strategies.

Fishery Harbours Authority

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the steps she is taking to remove Light Dues from the Co Down Fishing Fleet; and (ii) the investigation she has carried out into seeking assistance from the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbours Authority in relation to these charges. (AQW 6345/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I indicated in my answer to AQW 5461/08, responsibility for the provision of navigational aids at sea and the collection of light dues is not a devolved matter but continues to lie with the Department of Transport in London.

Focus Farm Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the role the Focus Farms, funded under measure 1.6 of the European Peace and Reconciliation programme, will have under the Focus Farm scheme being introduced under

measure 1.1 of the Rural Development programme 2007-2013. (AQW 6470/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The aim of this measure is to contribute to the competitiveness of agricultural and horticultural businesses in the North of Ireland through farmer-led training.

The programme will provide support to 60 focus farmers from 10 sectors of production. The focus farmers will host visits to their farm by groups of farmers. By outlining the important aspects of their farm business, focus farmers will pass on their experience to the visiting farmers and emphasise the vital components of a successful farm business.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Danny Blanchflower Complex

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any discussions his department has had in relation to the building of a stadium at the Danny Blanchflower complex in East Belfast. (AQW 6159/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): My Department has had limited correspondence with both the Roads Service and the Planning Service in regard to the possibility of building a stadium at Blanchflower Park. Both organisations were asked for preliminary views on a 25,000-seater stadium at that location.

Apart from the capacity requirement there were no specifications given by the Department and therefore Roads and Planning Service were confined to making general observations on the proposal.

Amateur Drama Festivals

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the support offered by his department to amateur drama festivals such as those held annually in Carrickmore, Newtown Stewart and Strabane. (AQW 6167/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Funding in support of drama festivals in Northern Ireland is disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The Arts Council has awarded funding to the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals as detailed in the table below. The Mid-Ulster (Carrickmore), Newtown Stewart and Strabane drama festivals are members of the Association.

Year	Programme	Grant (£)
2005-06	Lottery – Multi Annual Programme (3 year award)	34,500
2004-05	Annual Support for Organisations Programme	9,600
2002-03	Annual Support for Organisations Programme	9,500
2001-02	Annual Support for Organisations Programme	14,000
2000-01	Annual Support for Organisations Programme	9,500
1999-2000	Annual Support for Organisations Programme	10,500

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how much his department has spent on equality impact assessments and consultations over the last three years. (AQW 6172/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Over the last three years my department has spent £95,660.22 on consultations and equality impact assessments.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the targets set by his department in relation to the employment of people with disabilities over the next five years. (AQW 6195/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The department fully complies with all employment legislation regarding employment of people with disabilities. It will ensure that the recruitment policy will ensure equal opportunities for all

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail, in addition to his department's mainstream responsibilities, the resources that have been allocated to (i) Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; and (ii) the Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Area, in each of the last 2 years. (AQW 6286/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In addition to mainstream funding, resources allocated, in the past two years, to Neighbourhood Renewal areas through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Sport NI and the Integrated Development Fund amount to £13, 939, 259.

Strabane has been awarded, through the Community Sport Programme funding of £37, 500 in 2006/07 and £51, 869 in 2007/08.

Ulster Museum

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans for the 'contemporary history' project in the Ulster museum. (AQW 6327/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The new galleries at the refurbished Ulster Museum will include a history section, under the broad working heading 'Plantation to Power-Sharing', a series of connected displays which cover a 400 year period from the early 17th century to the present day. 'Contemporary history' will be addressed in this context and within a dedicated gallery space, the content of which is currently under development

There will be a display on the period referred to as "The Troubles", covering the years from the late 1960s to the present, which will chronicle many of the significant events and political developments of our recent past. This is work in progress, in the course of which curators and designers will develop relevant themes and select a range of appropriate objects for inclusion in the gallery.

Irish Communication

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of people who (i) can communicate verbally in Irish; (ii) can communicate in writing in Irish; and (iii) communicate in Irish on a daily basis. (AQW 6395/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is difficult to provide definitive answers to your specific questions. However I would refer you to the figures contained in the 2001 Census which were based on the number of people in Northern Ireland aged three and over. The findings show the numbers and the percentage of the total number who completed the returns:-

- 167,490 (10.35%) had some knowledge of the Irish language

These figures included

- 133,352 (8.24%) who could understand spoken Irish,
- 115,731 (7.15%) could speak Irish,

- 102,784 (6.35%) could read Irish
- 90,879 (5.62%) able to write Irish.

The 2001 Census data did not include a question asking respondents if they used Irish on a daily basis.

My officials are currently in discussion with a leading academic in the field of Irish language to explore how best to gather evidence on the extent and level of understanding of the Irish language in N.I.

Commonwealth Games

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the sports in which Northern Ireland competes at the Commonwealth Games.
(AQW 6397/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The programme of the Commonwealth Games consists of a maximum of 17 sports. At the Delhi 2010 Games the sports to be included will be:- aquatics, archery, athletics, badminton, boxing, cycling, gymnastics, hockey, lawn bowls, netball, rugby 7's, shooting, squash, table tennis, tennis, weightlifting and wrestling.

No selection has yet taken place for the Delhi Games, however, in 2006 Northern Ireland athletes competed in:- aquatics, athletics, badminton, boxing, cycling, gymnastics, lawn bowls, shooting, squash, table tennis and triathlon.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of working days lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months.
(AQW 6499/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Month	No of Days	Month	No of Days
May 2006	23	May 2007	59
June 2006	49	June 2007	15
July 2006	9	July 2007	20
August 2006	19	August 2007	43
September 2006	6	September 2007	48
October 2006	5	October 2007	54
November 2006	4	November 2007	39
December 2006	25	December 2007	44
January 2007	41	January 2008	63
February 2007	32	February 2008	77

Month	No of Days	Month	No of Days
March 2007	50	March 2008	39
April 2007	59	April 2008	58

Irish Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an update on the progress he has made in relation to formulating a strategy for the Irish language.
(AQW 6545/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) has, at its last two meetings held in January and April 2008, discussed the development of an Indigenous Minority Languages Strategy.

Further work on the strategy, at Departmental level, is underway, and I expect to be in a position to report on this matter later in the year.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the websites that come under his Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution.
(AQW 6603/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of DCAL. The table includes the number of visitors since devolution (8th May 2007) as well as the number of page views and associated maintenance costs for this period to date.

Information on page views has been included because visits to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement.

Websites that come under the Office's responsibility:

Website	Visitors	Page views	Maintenance Cost
www.dcalni.gov.uk	139,780	525,328	£689.40
www.dcal-fishingni.gov.uk	38,849	291,534	£6,027.51
www.proni.gov.uk	1,269,896	6,290,837	£804.53
www.rediscoverni.com	72,257	10,534,783	£114.90

Olympic Events

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the likely number of Olympic events

that will be held in the proposed multi sports stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQW 6737/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The official bid document [submitted to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) by London 2012 to host the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games] states that if Northern Ireland builds its planned stadium, this would be considered as a venue to hold the preliminary rounds of the Olympic Football Tournament. The location of the stadium was not mentioned in these documents.

Northern Ireland has been successful in having 27 sporting facilities included in the Pre-Games Training Camp Guide for 2012. Two of the venues are football facilities. The Pre Games Training Camp Guide is due to be launched at the Olympic Games in Beijing in the Summer of 2008.

Maze Stadium

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of whether (i) there is a location in Belfast that could accommodate a new multi sports stadium; (ii) this location could cater for the three main sporting organisations; and (iii) the allocation of £70 million could be reassigned to a new stadium in Belfast. (AQW 6738/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Outline Business Case on the Multi-Sport Stadium which the Department of Finance and Personnel is considering at present includes, as main options, building a two-sport (football and rugby) 30,000-seater stadium at the North Foreshore, Belfast and a three-sport (football, rugby and Gaelic games) 38,500-seater stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site. No other locations have been identified for either a two-sport or a three-sport scenario. On the matter of funding, I would refer to my answer given to you under AQW 6045/08.

EDUCATION

Capital Expenditure

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of capital expenditure by her department on new and existing schools in each of the last five years, broken down by parliamentary constituency and local government district. (AQW 5340/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Tá an caiteachas caipitil iomlán ar scoileanna nua agus ar scoileanna atá ann cheana féin i ngach ceann de na cúig bliana seo caite leagtha amach thíos:-

Total capital expenditure on new and existing schools in each of the last five years set out below:-

	£000s
2003/04	129,179
2004/05	140,759
2005/06	121,650
2006/07	135,672
2007/08	136,792 (estimate)

The capital figures include both major works and schools for new replacement schools and refurbishment of existing schools, and minor works schemes. The department does not hold the records of capital expenditure by constituency or district council, and it would only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Head Teachers

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to commission an investigation into reasons behind the gender imbalance in the employment of head teachers. (AQW 5414/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi láthair, i ndiaidh bheith i gcomhairle le fostóirí agus le ceardchumann, tá mo Roinn ag cur críche le téarmaí tagartha i gcomhair athbhreithnithe ar lucht saothair na scoileanna.

My Department is currently finalising terms of reference for a review of the school workforce, having consulted with employers and trade unions. The review will cover a wide range of issues, including gender balance both at school leadership level and in the teaching profession generally.

My Department is fully committed to integrating equality and diversity into its core priorities and functions. I recognise not only the importance of promoting equality, including gender equality, within education itself, but also the contribution that education can make to promoting equality throughout society.

Fire Prevention

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the current fire prevention legislation that is in place for schools; and to confirm if each school meets the required standards. (AQW 5525/08)

The Minister of Education: The current fire prevention legislation applied in schools is the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations (NI) 2001 and Building Regulations (NI) 2006 (part E). The risk assessments carried out under the Fire Precautions

Regulations also satisfy the Fire and Rescue Services (NI) Order 2006. There is a programme of work underway to ensure fire risk assessments are carried out for all schools.

Go dtí seo tá 750 curtha i gcrích. Tá gach measúnacht á meas ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus ag an Roinn le socrú cén gníomhú eile a theastaíonn.

To date 750 have been completed. Each of the assessments is being considered by the Education and Library Boards and the department to consider what further action is required.

Dyslexia Support

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail the support available to parents and schools in diagnosing a child with dyslexia. (AQW 5572/08)

The Minister of Education: Education and Library Boards (ELBs) do not provide a diagnostic service for children with dyslexia. They do, however, assess the special educational needs of children referred to them by, for example, schools and parents. Those referred for assessment will include children with dyslexia.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the ELBs that a range of special education support and provision is available to parents and schools for a child identified with dyslexia as follows:-

- Dyslexia awareness training to schools (and parents as requested by schools) to enhance the capacity of teachers to identify and respond appropriately in addressing dyslexia;
- In addition a range of strategies, resources and computer assisted programmes is available to pupils with dyslexia for whom more traditional methods are unsuccessful;
- All Educational Psychologists (EPs) are trained and skilled in the assessment and identification of dyslexia. Following the identification of dyslexia EPs provide a comprehensive range of support including recommendations and resources to parents and schools to assist the pupil achieve his/her potential;
- When children who are thought to have dyslexia are put forward for assessment at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice (COP), they are either screened for additional Board support by Psychology Assistants or EPs. The EPs use a large battery of cognitive and attainment tests in the identification of dyslexia. Agreed five-Board criteria for additional Stage 3 and Stage 5 support are applied in each case.
- Some schools have achieved or are working towards achievement of Dyslexia Friendly status usually in association with the British Dyslexia Association

(BDA). Schools are supported by the Board services in achieving this award;

From 2004/05 to 2007/08, the Department of Education (DE) has provided an additional £2m to the five ELBs to provide training for teachers in identification techniques relating to dyslexia.

Chomh maith leis sin, bhí an Roinn Oideachas páirteach in acmhainní ranga a tháirgeadh chun tacú le hidirghabhálacha dearfacha. Dáileadh na hacmhainní seo a leanas chuig gach scoil ó thuaidh: físteip chomhlántach, CD-ROM agus DVD-ROM ar Dhísléicse, arna léiriú ag comhghrúpa oibre ón Roinn Oideachais agus an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta i mBaile Átha Cliath, agus treoir do mhúinteoirí “Timpeallacht Thacúil Foghlama a Fhorbairt do Dhaltaí Disléicseacha”.

DE has also been involved in producing classroom resources to support positive interventions. A complementary video, CD-ROM and DVD-ROM on Dyslexia, produced by a joint working group from DE and the DES in Dublin, and a guide for teachers “Developing a Dyslexia Friendly Learning Environment”, have been distributed to all schools in the North.

Sports Grounds

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the monies available for developing sports grounds for (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools. (AQW 5666/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní ann do bhuiséad ar leith i gcomhair páirceanna spóirt a fhorbairt i scoileanna. Nuair atá iarbhunscóil nua á pleanáil déantar méid na talún atá ar fáil a fhorbairt go hiomlán do áiseanna spóirt, ar bhealach leordhóthanach chun an curaclam a chur i gcrích.

There is no specific budget for developing sports grounds at schools. When a new post-primary school is being planned, the amount of ground available is developed to its full potential for sports facilities, sufficient to deliver the curriculum. Sports pitches are not normally provided at primary schools. Primary schools are entitled to hard play and grass play areas sufficient to deliver the curriculum. Schools can also apply for minor capital works funding to address deficiencies in facilities including sports facilities.

Teaching Staff

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the average time taken for the appointment of teaching staff, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 5758/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne gurb é meánlíon na seachtainí a tógadh le baill teagaisc a cheapadh do gach ceann de na trí bliana seo caite ná:

The Education and Library Boards have indicated that the average number of weeks taken for the appointment of teaching staff for each of the last three years is as follows:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast Education and Library Board	12	13	14
North Eastern Education and Library Board	10	10	10
South Eastern Education and Library Board	11	17	17
Southern Education and Library Board 1	11	9	10
Western Education and Library Board 2	8	5.53	8

1 Figures are on the basis of a conditional offer of employment being issued prior to the pre-employment checks being conducted. Such checks during this period averaged 2 – 6 weeks.

2 Figures are on the basis of a conditional offer of employment being issued prior to the pre-employment checks being conducted. Thereafter, it can take from 4 – 10 weeks before the successful applicant takes up employment.

3 The majority of permanent teacher vacancies were advertised in the period from April – July. As a consequence shorter closing dates were used resulting in a reduction in the time taken to effect appointments.

Youth Workers

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of youth workers, funded by her department, who are based in the North Belfast constituency; and (ii) the organisations in which these youth workers are based. (AQW 5816/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Belfast and North Eastern Education and Library Boards and the Bytes Project which employ youth workers in the North Belfast constituency.

Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaigh Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste agus an Oirdheiscirt agus Stiúirthóir Bytes an t-eolas a leanas ar fáil ar líon na n-oibrithe óige a úsáidtear sa toghcheantar agus na heagraíochtaí ina bhfuil siad lonnaithe:

The Chief Executives of the Belfast and North Eastern Education and Library Boards and the Director of Bytes provided the following information on the number of youth workers deployed in the constituency and the organisations in which they are based:

	£000s	Part-time youth workers posts	Youth Workers Posts Funded by
Newlodge Bytes	2	1	Bytes Project
North Belfast Area Project	8	0	BELB
Fortwilliam Youth Club	1	7	BELB
Mountcollyer Youth Club	0	1	BELB
NewLodge Youth Club	1	3	BELB
Ardoyne Youth Club	1	6	BELB
Holy Family Youth Centre	1	6	BELB
JohnPaul II Youth Club	1	5	BELB
CairnLodge Youth Club	0	4	BELB
Mountainhill Youth Club	0	6	BELB
Deanby Youth Club	0	5	BELB
Woodvale Youth Club	0	2	BELB
Newtownabbey Phab	0	3	NEELB
Rathcoole Youth Centre	1	8	NEELB
Millgreen Youth Centre	1	7	NEELB

Review of Teacher Education

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to give a timescale within which the ‘Review of Teacher Education’ will be completed. (AQW 6038/08)

The Minister of Education: The joint Department of Education/Department for Employment and Learning review of teacher education has been taken forward in consultation with the wider education system through a series of annual teacher education conferences in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and culminating

in a meeting of stakeholders at a Teacher Education Review Workshop in 2007.

Ar scór an phróisis chomhairliúcháin seo, agus ag cur san áireamh tuairimí breise ó bhaill de Ghrúpa Pháirtithe Leasmhara le haghaidh Oideachais Mhúinteoirí déanfar dréacht de chreatphaipéar beartais ar Athbheithniú ar Oideachas Múinteoirí a chur chugam agus chuig an Aire Empey sula i bhfad.

On foot of this consultative process, and taking account of further comments from members of the Teacher Education Stakeholders' Group, a draft Teacher Education Review policy framework paper will be submitted to me and to Minister Empey in the near future. The timescale for completion of the Review from that point onwards will be determined by a number of factors, including consideration by the DE and DEL Committees, the other Ministers and the Executive Committee.

Sure Start Programme

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the next 3 years, the projected funding for every Sure Start programme.

(AQW 6067/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sonraí maidir le gach Surestart le linn na dtrí bliana airgeadais seo caite le fáil sa tábla thíos:

Details of projected funding for current Sure Start projects are contained in the table below:

Project	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Clogher Valley	£455,728	£466,210	£476,933
Orana	£638,249	£652,929	£667,946
Close to Home	£500,127	£511,630	£523,397
South Armagh	£549,277	£561,910	£574,834
Blossom	£501,947	£513,492	£525,302
Keady/ Callanbridge	£102,500	£104,858	£107,269
Splash	£552,359	£565,063	£578,060
Little Hands	£440,984	£451,127	£461,503
Shantallow	£500,370	£511,879	£523,652
Dungiven	£461,186	£471,793	£482,645
Strabane	£667,787	£683,146	£698,858
Last, Omagh	£508,805	£520,508	£532,479
Cherish Irvinestown	£511,688	£523,457	£535,496
West Bank, Derry	£338,458	£346,243	£354,206

Project	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
East Bank, Derry	£438,979	£449,076	£459,404
West Tyrone	£321,387	£328,779	£336,341
Ballymena South	£658,642	£673,791	£689,288
Coleraine	£539,433	£551,840	£564,532
Dalriada	£487,882	£499,103	£510,583
Gold	£533,169	£545,432	£557,977
Horizon	£449,864	£460,211	£470,796
Newtownabbey	£567,556	£580,610	£593,964
SMILE	£441,244	£451,393	£461,775
Glenbrook	£411,704	£421,173	£430,860
Shankill	£487,149	£498,353	£509,816
Clan Mor	£447,685	£457,982	£468,515
Downpatrick	£551,404	£564,086	£577,060
LAP	£481,795	£492,876	£504,212
Colin Neighbourhood	£546,349	£558,915	£571,770
East Belfast	£594,634	£608,311	£622,302
South Belfast	£618,620	£632,848	£647,404
Outer West	£419,682	£429,335	£439,209
Upper Springfield	£378,682	£387,392	£396,302
Beechmount	£163,432	£167,191	£171,036

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Education to detail the amount of money her department has spent on (i) equality impact assessments; and (ii) consultations, over the last three years. (AQW 6116/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl eolas ar fáil ar chostais bheachta na measúnachtaí ar thionchar an chomhionannais agus na comhairliúcháin a rinneadh le trí bliana anuas. Cuirtear na gníomhaíochtaí seo i bhfeidhm mar chuid de ghnáthghnó na Roinne agus ní dhéantar na costais a idirdhealú.

Information is not available on the precise costs of equality impact assessments and consultations over the last three years. These activities are carried out as part of the Department's normal business and the costs are not recorded separately.

The Department, in line with other NICS departments, follows the Equality Commission's Guiding Principals on Consultation as well as their Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

Assembly Questions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the cost of translation into Irish of (a) answers to Assembly question; and (b) all other departmental documents since May 2007; and (ii) the procedure used to carry out such translation. (AQW 6127/08)

The Minister of Education:

- i) Expenditure on partially or completely translating Assembly questions into the Irish language is £1,254¹. Expenditure on translating all other departmental documents partially or completely into Irish is £11,650². This figure is from 8 May 2007 to 18 April 2008 and includes some documents that have been translated from Irish into English.
- ii) Tá an Roinn Cultúir, ealaíona agus Fóillíochta (DCAL) freagrach as seirbhís aistriúcháin agus teangaireachta a bhainistiú do gach Roinn. Tá liosta comhlachtaí atá ceadaithe chun aistriúcháin Ghaeilge agus ón nGaeilge a sholáthar ag DCAL agus Rannóg Soláthair Lárnach na Roinne Airgeadais
- ii) The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for managing a translation and interpretation service for all Departments. DCAL and Central Procurement Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel have set up a call off list of firms who can provide translations into and out of Irish. Requests for translations are submitted to DCAL who distribute to the translators on a rotational basis. Once translations are completed DCAL returns to the Department.

Assembly Questions

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the process of obtaining a translation of a document or answer to an Assembly question into Irish. (AQW 6146/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for managing a translation and interpretation service for all Departments. DCAL and Central Procurement Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel have set up a call off list of firms who can provide translations into and out of Irish. Requests for translations are submitted to DCAL who distribute to the translators on a rotational basis. Once translations are completed DCAL returns to the Department.

¹ Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices

² Figure is not final due to outstanding invoices

Tá liosta ann de chomhlachtaí atá ceadaithe chun aistriúcháin a sholáthar, mar sin athraíonn na táillí.

There is a call off list of firms who provide translations therefore charges vary.

Language Translation

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost, per word, to have a document translated from English into Irish. (AQW 6147/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for managing a translation and interpretation service for all Departments. DCAL and Central Procurement Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel have set up a call off list of firms who can provide translations into and out of Irish. Requests for translations are submitted to DCAL who distribute to the translators on a rotational basis. Once translations are completed DCAL returns to the Department.

Tá liosta ann de chomhlachtaí atá ceadaithe chun aistriúcháin a sholáthar, mar sin athraíonn na táillí.

There is a call off list of firms who provide translations therefore charges vary.

Irish-Medium Schools

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to provide a summary of the inspectorate reports of each Irish-medium school in each of the Education Boards. (AQW 6148/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá achoimre ar na tuarascálacha cigireachta do scoileanna Gaeilge i ngach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar fáil ar láithreán Gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais.

The summary of the inspection reports for Irish-medium schools in each Education and Library Board are available on the DE website.

A web link to each of the school reports is provided below.

BELFAST EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
Bunscoil An Tsleibhe Dhuibh	104-6593	Follow-up	Nov '01
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2001_11/follow_up_inspection_bunscoil_an_tsleibhe_dhuibh.DOC			
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	104-6596	Focused	Apr '07

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2007_06/focused_inspection_bunscoil_bheann_mhadagain_belfast.PDF			
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	104-6501	Focused	May '02
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2002_10/focused_inspection_bunscoil_phobal_feirste.DOC			
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	104-6501	Follow-up	Jan '04
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2004_02/follow_up_inspection_bunscoil_phobal_feirste_belfast.DOC			
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal Belfast	104-6571	General	Apr '01
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2002_01/general_inspection_gaelscoil_na_bhfal_belfast.DOC			
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal Belfast	104-6571	Survey (Creative & Expressive)	Feb '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_04/creative_and_expressive_survey_gaelscoil_na_bhfal_belfast.DOC			
Meanscoil Feirste	124-0291	Follow-up	Nov '01
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2002_01/follow_up_inspection_meanscoil_feirste.DOC			
Meanscoil Feirste	124-0291	Focused	Nov '00
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2000_08/meanscoil_feirste.DOC			
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal Belfast	104-6571	Follow-up	May '03
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2003_08/Follow_up_Inspection_Report_Gaelscoil%20na%20bFhal_Belfast.DOC			
Scoil An Droichid Belfast	104-6641	Focused	Feb '04
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2004_06/focused_inspection_scoil_an_droichid_belfast.DOC			
Scoil An Droichid Belfast	104-6641	Follow-up	Jun '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_06/follow_up_inspection_scoil_an_droichid_belfast.DOC			
Colaiste Feirste	124-0291	Secondary	Feb '07
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2007_05/standard_inspection_colaiсте_feirste_belfast.PDF			

WESTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
Bunscoil An Traonaigh Lisnaskea	204-6669	Focused	May '07
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2007_06/focused_inspection_bunscoil_an_traonaigh_lisnaskea.PDF			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Follow-up	Mar '02
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2002_06/follow-up_inspection_report_%20bunscoil_cholmcille.DOC			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Focused	May '99
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/1999_11/bunscoil_cholmcille_londonderry.DOC			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Follow-up	Jun '00
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2000_08/bunscoil_cholmcille.DOC			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Follow-up	Feb '01
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2001_03/bunscoil_cholmcille.DOC			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Follow-up	Jan '03
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2003_03/follow_up_inspection_bunscoil_cholmcille_londonderry.DOC			
Bunscoil Cholmcille	203-6574	Follow-up	Feb '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_04/creative_and_expressive_survey_bunscoil_cholmcille_londonderry.DOC			
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	204-6646	Focused	Jun '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_08/focused_inspection_gaelscoil_eadain_mhoir.DOC			
Gaelscoil Eadin Mhoir	204-6646	Follow-up	May '07
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2007_08/follow_up_inspection_gaelscoil_eadain_mhoir_derry.PDF			
Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh Strabane	204-6638	Survey (ICT)	May '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_08/ict_survey_gaelscoil_ui_dhochartaigh_strabane.DOC			

NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
Bunscoil An Chaistil	304-6653	Focused	Nov '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2006_02/focused_inspection_bunscoil_an_chaistil.DOC			
Bunscoil An Chaistil	304-6653	Follow-up	Jan '08
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2008_01/follow_up_inspection_bunscoil%20an%20chaistil_ballycastle.PDF			

SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
Scoil Na Fuiseoige Belfast	404-6600	Focused	Jan '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_02/focused_inspection_scoil_na_fuiseoige_belfast.DOC			
Scoil Na Fuiseoige Belfast	404-6600	Follow-up	Jun '06
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2006_06/follow_up_inspection_scoil_na_fuiseoige_primary_school_belfast.DOC			

SOUTHERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	De Reference	Inspection Type	Inspection Date
Bunscoil An Iuir	504-6597	District Inspection	Feb '05
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2005_05/creative_and_expressive_survey_bunscoil_an_iuir.DOC			
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	504-6637	Follow-up	Mar '08
http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/insp/inspection_reports/2008_04/follow_up_inspection_gaelscoil_ui_neill_coalisland.PDF			

Language Translation

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to identify the person or organisation tasked with carrying out the process of translation into Irish on behalf of the department. (AQW 6154/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for managing a translation and interpretation service for all Departments. DCAL and Central Procurement Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel have set up a call off list of firms who can provide translations into and out of Irish. Requests for translations are submitted to DCAL who distribute to

the translators on a rotational basis. Once translations are completed DCAL returns to the Department.

Tá liosta ann de chomhlachtaí atá ceadaithe chun aistriúcháin a sholáthar, mar sin athraíonn na táillí.

There is a call off list of firms who provide translations therefore charges vary.

Killard Special School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) pupils; and (ii) staff, at Killard Special School. (AQW 6164/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa bhliain 2007/08 bhí 171 dalta ag freastal ar Killard Special School.

In 2007/08, there were 171 pupils at Killard Special School.

The full-time equivalent number of staff was 52.4. This figure is made up of 26.5 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 25.9 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff.

Note:

1. Latest available figures for teaching staff relate to 2006/07. However, figures for full-time equivalent non-teaching staff relate to 2007/08.
2. The source for enrolment figures is the annual school census.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of staff who have been authorised to work from home since May 2007. (AQW 6221/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó Bhealtaine 2007 i leith ní cheadaíodh d'aon bhall foirne sa Roinn Oideachais obair ón mbaile.

No staff within the Department of Education have been authorised to work from home since May 2007.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why a meeting was held between the South Eastern Education and Library Board and the parents of children attending Donaghadee High School, on Tuesday 22 April, given that the SEELB (i) had no further information; and (ii) could not provide answers to questions posed by the parents. (AQW 6322/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that it

arranged consultation meetings with the Board of Governors, staff and parents of pupils at Donaghadee High School to inform them of the proposed date of closure of 31 August 2009 and that it was also proposed that no pupils would be admitted to year 8 in September 2008. These details were not available at earlier consultation meetings. Any outstanding responses to questions raised by parents are being compiled and will be made available via the school principal.

Tuigim gur eisigh an Bord litreacha comhairliúcháin do scoileanna sa limistéar, don fhoireann agus do na tuismitheoirí ag Ardscoil Domhnach Daoi ar 4 Aibreán 2008. Níor tháinig preaseisiúint faoin scéal seo ón mBord. Bheadh tuismitheoirí feasach go bhféadfaí an scoil a dhúnadh ó chruinnithe comhairliúcháin roimhe sin.

I understand the Board issued consultation letters to schools in the area, the staff and parents of pupils at Donaghadee High School on 4 April 2008. There was no press release on this matter from the Board. Parents would also have been aware of the potential for the closure of the school from previous consultation meetings.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why the parents of children attending Donaghadee High School were informed in the press that the school was being recommended for closure by the Commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, given that their development proposal was not due to be published until 29 April 2008. (AQW 6330/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that it arranged consultation meetings with the Board of Governors, staff and parents of pupils at Donaghadee High School to inform them of the proposed date of closure of 31 August 2009 and that it was also proposed that no pupils would be admitted to year 8 in September 2008. These details were not available at earlier consultation meetings. Any outstanding responses to questions raised by parents are being compiled and will be made available via the school principal.

Tuigim gur eisigh an Bord litreacha comhairliúcháin do scoileanna sa limistéar, don fhoireann agus do na tuismitheoirí ag Ardscoil Domhnach Daoi ar 4 Aibreán 2008. Níor tháinig preaseisiúint faoin scéal seo ón mBord. Bheadh tuismitheoirí feasach go bhféadfaí an scoil a dhúnadh ó chruinnithe comhairliúcháin roimhe sin.

I understand the Board issued consultation letters to schools in the area, the staff and parents of pupils at Donaghadee High School on 4 April 2008. There was no press release on this matter from the Board. Parents would also have been aware of the potential for the closure of the school from previous consultation meetings.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of working days lost by her Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6500/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Month	Working days lost due to stress-related illnesses	
	2006/ 07	2007/ 08
April	85	34
May	31	40
June	5	27
July	3	20
August	37	22
September	20	36
October	36	63
November	82	100
December	62	58
January	44	66
February	36	56
March	18	50

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Migrant Workers

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the provision of construction skills and health and safety training for migrant workers. (AQW 6196/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has published guidance, which indicates relevant training and information, in English, Russian

and Polish for migrant workers in the construction industry. Access to skills training is available to migrant workers on construction sites through CITB's Mobile Training Unit.

Education Funding

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his plans to provide young people in asylum to be assessed as Home Students in order to qualify for university education funding. (AQW 6199/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In order to qualify for home fee status for tuition fees at Higher Education Institutions, young asylum seekers in Northern Ireland must be "ordinarily resident" in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the three-year period preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course and be a "person with leave to enter or remain" in the UK. This residency rule applies throughout the UK. There are no plans to change this since legal advice is that Northern Ireland should maintain parity in matters relating to immigration and asylum in which the Home Office takes the lead.

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of staff in his department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6218/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: During the period 8th May 2007 to 21st April 2008 the number of staff in his department who, since 8 May 2007, have received (i) official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures are outlined in the table below:

Process	Number of official warnings issued	Number of staff who faced disciplinary procedures
Conduct and Discipline	6	8
Inefficiency sickness	110	427
Inefficiency Performance	1	1

College Merger

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any discussions his department has had with Queens University and Stranmillis College

in relation to a possible merger between the two institutions. (AQW 6240/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As you would expect, my Department has a continuing and positive relationship with both Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College, which entails discussions on a wide range of issues. Given the range of factors affecting Initial Teacher Education, including the falling number of pupils and surplus of teachers, my Department has had ongoing discussions with the College about its potential future direction. In particular, at senior level in the past six months there has been one meeting with Queen's University and one with Stranmillis University College.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the targets his department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in his department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6261/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. Equal opportunities monitoring of the Northern Ireland Civil Service workforce and the associated setting of goals or targets, is a function carried out by Central Personnel Group in the Department of Finance and Personnel on behalf of the NICS.

The NICS does not set specific goals or targets for the employment of people with disabilities, but is committed to ensuring that its employment policies and practices provide people with disabilities, with an equal opportunity for employment and advancement. The NICS proactively tries to identify measures to encourage people with disabilities to consider a career in the NICS and, when appointed, to remove any barriers to their retention and progression within the Service.

Staff do not always declare disabilities for monitoring purposes, but Departments make reasonable adjustments across the range of employment practices including, recruitment and selection, training and development, and working arrangements, to ensure people with disabilities are not disadvantaged.

Occupational Therapy Course

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students from (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) Scotland; (iv) Wales; and (iv) England, who have been

accepted into the Occupational Therapy course at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. (AQW 6296/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

As a proxy for accepted students the Department can provide information on the number of first year enrolments on the Occupational Therapy course at the University of Ulster (UU), Jordanstown.

The total number of first year students from (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) Scotland; (iv) Wales; and (v) England, enrolled on the Occupational Therapy course at the UU, Jordanstown in 2006/07 are detailed in the table below:

Domicile	Total
Northern Ireland	35
Republic of Ireland	0
Scotland	0
Wales	0
England	0

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6300/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department has not sold any land in the North Down constituency since 2002.

Departmental Land

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the land and acreage belonging to the department, and the plans for this land. (AQW 6309/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The only land owned by my Department is the former Government Training Centre site at Felden (3.516 hectare). The Northern Regional College are using it, on a temporary basis, as a training/teaching facility until they complete a new build and refurbishment project at their Newtownabbey Campus. These new facilities are expected to be ready for occupation by January 2010 at which time the Felden Centre will become surplus to requirements and will be sold through the Public Sector Disposal of Surplus Land and Property arrangements.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of staff in his department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6372/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: No staff of the Department for Employment and Learning have been formally authorised to work from home since 8th May 2007.

However some managers may allow staff in certain circumstances to work from home on an ad hoc basis: for example, to complete certain pieces of work; to accommodate particular home or travel pressures for a short-term period; or to facilitate recommended reasonable adjustments. No records of these arrangements are held centrally.

Department Correspondence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6377/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department for Employment and Learning monitors and promotes the use of electronic communications, as part of its green policy initiative which was introduced in March 2005.

Staff have been instructed to use electronic distribution of information, whenever possible, for both internal and external communications. This policy has been adopted in order to reduce the volume of printed material and applies to consultation documents, reports, leaflets etc.

External customers are also encouraged to communicate with the Department through electronic means.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the discussions he or his officials had with Stranmillis University college and Queens University Belfast in relation to a possible merger, prior to the announcement by the chairman of the board of governors of Stranmillis that a merger had been agreed. (AQW 6398/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

As you would expect my Department has regular discussions with both Queen's University Belfast

and Stranmillis University College about a range of issues. In the last six months one meeting was held between senior officials of the Department and Queen's University Belfast about potential options for the College and one meeting between senior officials of the Department and Stranmillis University College about potential options for the College.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to give his assessment of the decision by Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University college to merge. (AQW 6399/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

A decision by Stranmillis University College and QUB to merge has only been taken in principle. Under the existing legislation, the Governing Body of Stranmillis shall not effect any major change in the character of the college without the consent of my Department. In addition any such proposal, if approved, would require new legislation which will be subject to consultation in line with normal Committee and Assembly procedures.

Further Education Courses

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of students enrolled in (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time, further education courses in each district council area. (AQW 6789/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Full-year data for the 2007/08 academic year will not be available until November 2008. However, student numbers in Northern Ireland's Further Education colleges in 2006/07, by mode of attendance and by Local Government District, is provided in the Table below.

Local Government District	Mode of Attendance		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Antrim	600	2,169	2,769
Ards	1,006	2,854	3,860
Armagh	729	2,723	3,452
Ballymena	782	2,183	2,965
Ballymoney	462	1,270	1,732
Banbridge	491	1,883	2,374
Belfast	2,598	13,434	16,032
Carrickfergus	410	1,212	1,622

Local Government District	Mode of Attendance		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Castlereagh	728	3,270	3,998
Coleraine	777	2,338	3,115
Cookstown	480	1,289	1,769
Craigavon	1,095	3,708	4,803
Derry	1,976	5,107	7,083
Down	1,281	3,003	4,284
Dungannon	728	2,563	3,291
Fermanagh	761	2,915	3,676
Larne	314	1,173	1,487
Limavady	420	1,672	2,092
Lisburn	1,100	4,093	5,193
Magherafelt	580	1,499	2,079
Moyle	230	574	804
Newry & Mourne	978	4,986	5,964
Newtownabbey	769	2,678	3,447
North Down	842	3,799	4,641
Omagh	430	2,346	2,776
Strabane	421	2,038	2,459
Lgd Unknown	1,336	3,340	4,676
Total	22,324	80,119	102,443

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Further Education Campus

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) the capital investment plans he has for the Strabane area; and (ii) his plans to ensure that the main Further Education Campus is located in Strabane. (AQW 6791/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The former North West Institute had submitted proposals for new build and refurbishment of its accommodation at a number of campuses, including proposals for a new build at the Strabane campus. As you are aware, North West Institute has now merged with Limavady College to form the new North West Regional College. The new college's main campus is located on the Strand Road, Londonderry.

The merger took place on 1 August 2007 and the new Senior Management Team and the newly appointed Governing Body are currently reviewing the proposals submitted by its predecessors. Further decisions can be made when the college has updated

its Estates Strategy, the objective of which is to clarify its accommodation needs across all campuses. Officials from my Department are supporting the college in this work.

Departmental Spending

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, for the last 3 years, his Department's budget spend, broken down by district council area. (AQW 6792/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Please see below a summary of the budget expenditure for the Department for Employment and Learning for the last 3 years. These figures represent the Departmental Net Resource Outturn as shown in Note 2 of the annual resource accounts. The accounts for 2007/08 are not yet finalised.

	2006/07 £'000	2005/06 £'000	2004/05 £'000
Total Expenditure	700,267	675,429	681,198

Unfortunately the Department cannot provide this information broken down by district council as requested, as it does not hold the information in this format.

Further Education Courses

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, further education courses currently delivered by the North West Regional College at its campus locations in (a) the Derry/Londonderry City Council area; (b) the Limavady Borough Council area; and (c) the Strabane District Council area. (AQW 6793/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The table below provides details on the number of full-time and part-time courses which are currently being delivered at North West Regional College campuses in Derry/Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane in the 2007/08 academic year.

Campus	FT	PT	Total
Londonderry/Derry	152	983	1135
Limavady	41	252	293
Strabane	3	57	60
Totals	196	1292	1488

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6246/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): Since 2002, Invest NI has completed 7 land sale transactions, accounting for 9 acres in total, from its Balloo South Industrial Estate, which is within the North Down Parliamentary Constituency.

Other than these transactions, there have been no land sales made by the Department in the North Down Constituency in the period since 2002.

5 transactions were by way of a 999 year lease, 1 was a freehold disposal of 0.05 acres, and 1 was a transfer of the wetlands area on the Balloo estate to North Down Borough Council.

As at 31st March 2008, Invest NI's land holding in the constituency was 63 acres of which 20 remained available to clients with an approved business case and an immediate demonstrable property need.

Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Industries

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he is specifically targeting bioscience and pharmaceutical industries for growth and new investment, and in which locations and educational facilities is there public investment in education and research and development in subject areas necessary for these industries. (AQW 6334/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Life Sciences sector has been identified and targeted as a priority sector by Invest NI in line with the Regional Innovation Strategy. This sector is well placed to benefit from further strategic investment as it includes a number of companies operating on a global basis, two leading universities undertaking cutting edge research and has a highly skilled workforce.

There has been significant recent investment in the Life Sciences sector. Invest NI has offered £41 million over the last four years in support of life sciences projects, stimulating total investment of £205 million. There are also a number of significant Life Sciences projects under appraisal that will further contribute to the development of this sector in Northern Ireland. Invest NI has also supported companies to attend

major exhibitions in the US and Europe and has also appointed a specialist Life Sciences Consultant to generate inward investment from North America, focused on high potential start-ups.

The agency also funded a review of the NI Life & Health Technologies Sector which reported its findings in November 2006 and these were used by DETI's Matrix Life & Health Sciences Panel as a basis for its discussions.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning operates a number of specific initiatives, mainly the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) and the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) which have established a number of Research Centres in our two universities that operate in the bio science and pharmaceutical fields. Centres that have been supported include, the Centre for Cancer Research & Cell Biology at Queens and the Centre for Molecular Biosciences at the University of Ulster.

In January, the Minister for Health in Northern Ireland announced the establishment of the 'European Centre for Connected Health' in Northern Ireland and also a budget of £46 million for chronic disease management. The new Centre will take forward the introduction of new technologies to offer a better quality of life to people with long-term conditions such as diabetes. Invest NI is working closely with the Department of Health to leverage the economic benefits arising from investment in connected health solutions, specifically targeting Foreign Direct Investment projects in this sector.

I continue to support the significant investment being made by Government in Life Sciences and fully recognise the major role that this sector can play in the development of a knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland

Zoned Land

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current status of the industrial zoned land at Doogary, Omagh; and to provide an update on the progress of the projects proposed for this site. (AQW 6552/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI's land holding at Doogary is circa 47 acres occupying land either side of Bankmore Road. Private sector land is currently being developed between Invest NI's land and the A5.

In the last 12 months Invest NI has completed land sales of 16 acres at Doogary to 3 client companies and is currently in contract with a fourth for the remaining 6.6 acres. Once this sale has completed the Doogary

estate will be fully leased to client companies with economic development projects.

Invest NI sales are by way of a 999 year lease which requires purchasers to have finished construction within 18 months of completing the sale.

Omagh is one of four locations that Invest NI has identified where it urgently needs to acquire new land to service the needs of its clients. While the process of acquiring land in these areas has commenced and press advertisements have been placed seeking interest, experience shows that this is likely to be a protracted process

Business Units

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the demand for modern office and small business units in East Belfast. (AQW 6730/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Within my Department, Invest NI has responsibility for the provision of serviced sites to its client base. Invest NI can comment only in respect of the needs of its clients.

In the East Belfast constituency there is a significant amount of land zoned for employment use held within the private sector. Invest NI policy is not to intervene where there is no evidence of market failure in the industrial property market. In addition to the existing supply, workspace is under construction at the NI Science Park, Titanic Quarter and Sydenham/Airport Road.

Invest NI does not have a land holding in East Belfast. However, information on the private sector property offerings is publicised through its online property database and it has arranged a number of site visits to both new and existing properties in the constituency in recent months for clients seeking a property solution.

Invest NI works closely with Planning Service in the Area Plan process, to ensure that adequate land is zoned for the needs of its client companies. The East Belfast area is subject to the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) which has zoned 102 acres of new industrial land, a large proportion of which is at Titanic Quarter. This is in addition to the significant amount of land already zoned for industrial use in the constituency such as the 188 acres in the Harbour Estate between Titanic Quarter and Hollywood Exchange.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Legislation

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail her plans to increase or abolish (i) the 4 year rule; and (ii) the 10 year rule, when enforcement action cannot be taken against alleged breaches of planning legislation. (AQW 5976/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I have no current plans to increase or abolish the time limits for taking enforcement action against breaches of planning control, however, I shall be looking at the effectiveness of planning enforcement as part of the wider Planning Reform Programme.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the provisional; and (ii) confirmed, Tree Preservation Orders served on the owners of Myrtle Lodge, Bryansford Road, Newcastle. (AQW 5977/08)

The Minister of the Environment: A provisional Tree Preservation Order was imposed on lands at Myrtle Lodge on 18 September 2007. Following consultation with Landscape Architects Branch, the Order, which was modified to exclude some trees originally protected, was confirmed on 18 March 2008 and posted on site on 20 March 2008. Both provisional and confirmed Tree Preservation Orders were posted on the land, as the owners were unknown and the land was unregistered. They stipulate that no person shall, except with the consent of the Department and in accordance with the conditions, if any, imposed on such consent, uproot, wilfully damage, cut down, top, lop, or wilfully destroy or cause or permit the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage or wilful destruction of any tree specified or comprised in a group of trees or in a woodland therein specified.

Building Sites

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if she has any plans to introduce legislation to compel developers to keep their building sites in good order until building work commences. (AQW 6090/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no specific plans at present.

Church Street, Ballymena

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment if planning permission for use of the ground floor at 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena has been granted; and to detail any action being taken over non-compliance with planning law in Church Street, Ballymena. (AQW 6190/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service has confirmed that permission for the use of the ground floor of 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena as an office has not been granted. I can also confirm that my Department is currently investigating two properties in Church Street, Ballymena for unauthorised changes of use and will progress appropriate action if required.

Dual Mandates

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to expedite legislation which will disallow Executive Ministers from holding seats on local councils. (AQW 6205/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In my statement to the Assembly on the future shape of local government, on 31 March 2008, I stated my intention to "...work with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office in order to introduce legislative proposals to end the dual mandate of those councillors who are also Members of the Assembly..."

This work is progressing as part of the implementation process. The Executive Ministers, referred to in the Member's question, are a subset of the larger MLA group.

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that she has flown business class in her capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by her department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) she is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6242/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Since 8 May 2007 I have flown on five occasions by business class in my capacity as Minister at a total cost of £1,522.85. It is standard practice to fly business class on such journeys to facilitate working during the flight.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the targets her department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in her department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6263/08)

The Minister of the Environment: This Department does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Crumlin Glen Project

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) her involvement in the Crumlin Glen project; (ii) the finance provided by her department; (iii) to whom these finances were provided; and (iv) when any payments were made. (AQW 6278/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Antrim Borough Council applied to my Department in December 2004 for grant aid towards the cost of a new footpath at Crumlin Glen. EHS subsequently made, in March 2005, an offer of £14,063 to the Council. Although the Council has now completed the construction of the path and submitted a claim to EHS, payment of the grant to the Council will not be made until such time as the path is fully open for use by the public.

Waste Water Treatment Works

Mr Butler asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how new developments in the Dumurry area will deal with sewage, given that Northern Ireland Water has stated that new developments cannot be connected to the Waste Water Treatment Works in Dunmurry. (AQW 6288/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Those responsible for new developments situated in the area served by the Dunmurry sewerage system may approach Northern Ireland Water to agree an interim solution that does not adversely impact on the environment. In some circumstances the developer may decide to provide a private treatment plant for which a discharge consent from the Environment and Heritage Service will be required under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Alternatively, occupation of new developments may be delayed until capacity becomes available at the waste water treatment works and within the sewerage system.

Environment and Heritage Service

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the purpose of the proposed £170.5 million budgetary allocation for the Environment and Heritage Service in the year 2010-2011. (AQW 6302/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The figure of £170.5m relates to proposed capital investment in Environment and Heritage Services in 2010-11 as shown in the Investment table in the 'Draft Budget 2008-2011' document, published in October 2007. However, in the final 'Budget 2008-2011' document, published in January 2008, this figure increased to £181.8m. The spending area 'Environment and Heritage Services' covers both the Environment and Heritage Service executive agency and the core division Planning and Environmental Policy Group.

Of the £181.8m, £180.1m is funding to district councils to cover the costs associated with compliance with the EU Landfill Directive targets, which will help reduce the levels of land-filled biodegradable municipal waste to 75% of 1995 levels by 2010, 50% by 2015 and 35% by 2020. The remaining £1.7m will be capital investment in nature reserves, monuments, archaeological sites, listed buildings and country parks. The increase of £11.3m between the draft and final investment in 2010-11 is due exclusively to re-profiling of the funding to the councils.

Publicity and Advertising Spending

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how much she spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008. (AQW 6314/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department spent £3,952,706 on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008.

Department Correspondence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which her Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6379/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department has no mechanisms in place to monitor the extent to which its correspondence or distribution of publications is carried out electronically.

Planning Service

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of apartments approved by the Planning Service in the (i) South; (ii) East; (iii) West; and (iv) North, Belfast constituencies. (AQW 6388/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret that the Planning Service's current IT system does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested. Accurate figures for the years in question could only be provided through a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost

Greenbelt Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 707/08, to detail the legal status that the Greenbelt Company has as a manager and maintainer of areas of open space, under Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Recreation. (AQW 6393/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Greenbelt Company has no particular legal status under Planning Policy Statement 8. However, the Department has accepted schemes for housing development in various parts of Northern Ireland where it is intended that the open space(s) to be provided as an integral part of the development will be managed and ongoing maintenance provided by this company.

Greenbelt Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of housing developments that have their 10% open space managed by the Greenbelt Company. (AQW 6394/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The only means of detailing the number of housing developments that have their 10% open space managed by the Greenbelt Company would be to manually search individual files across all Planning Service Divisional Offices. This would involve a disproportionate amount of time and cost.

Illegal Dumping

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action that the Environment and Heritage Crime Team has taken against illegal dumping at Bentra Road, Whitehead. (AQW 6403/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has

completed two investigations of a site at 45 Bentra Road, Ballycarry and these have resulted in successful prosecutions. The court dates were 29 November 2005 and 19 February 2008. The details are as follows:

On 29 November 2005, Mr Samuel McAllister of Bentra Road, Ballycarry was fined £1,400, plus costs, at Belfast Magistrates Court for breaches of waste management legislation. Mr McAllister was present to plead guilty to seven charges (under Articles 4(1) (b) and Article 5 (1) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997). These offences were for the disposal of controlled waste without a waste management authorisation, in a manner likely to cause pollution to the environment or harm to human health, and knowingly permitting others to dispose of controlled waste on his land. EHS officers carried out an inspection on 12 August 2004, when they observed controlled waste being stored and burnt. No application had been received by EHS for a waste management licence.

On 19 February 2008, Mr Sam McAllister of 45 Bentra Road, Ballycarry was given a conditional discharge at Belfast Magistrates Court. EHS, through the PPS, brought seven charges against Mr McAllister relating to offences in 2007 under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. On this occasion, before waste was burned in July 2007, Mr McAllister was warned not to burn waste and stated under caution that vandals had broken in and started the fire without his consent on the 11 July 2007. For the burning of waste and running an unauthorised waste transfer station, he received a conditional discharge.

No planning permission was ever granted for the premises at 45 Bentra Road for waste management activities and consequently no licence to operate a waste transfer station or carry out waste disposal can be issued. EHS has recently opened a new investigation into unauthorised waste management activities at the Bentra Road site.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Ford asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the discussion she has had with the Minister for Social Development in relation to the environmental benefits of accelerating the fuel poverty strategy. (AQW 6421/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I can confirm that I have not had any discussions with Margaret Ritchie, MLA Minister for Social Development regarding the fuel poverty strategy.

The Department of the Environment is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Fuel Poverty.

Wind Turbines

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment for her assessment of the impact of Planning Policy Statement 18 in relation to wind turbines.

(AQW 6458/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Wind turbine developments are assessed against current published policy set out in policy PSU12 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland. Draft PPS 18 'Renewable Energy' is a consultation document reviewing this policy. The primary aim of draft PPS 18 is to encourage and facilitate the provision and siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment.

While Draft PPS 18 is a material consideration in line with provisions of paragraph 50 of PPS 1 'General Principles', limited weight is given to its contents until such times it is published in final form.

Renewable Energy Developments

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment for her assessment of the impact that the current draft supplementary planning guidance for Planning Policy Statement 18 will have on the rate and scale of approvals for renewable energy developments. (AQW 6460/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The draft guidance is intended to assist developers in identifying sites for wind energy development as well as defining the type of development that may be most suitable in landscape and visual terms. It is also intended to inform planners' judgements on the impacts and acceptability of proposed wind energy developments in landscape and visual.

The draft guidance provides amplification on landscape issues for wind energy proposals assessed under Policy RE 1 of draft PPS18. Two of the main objectives behind policy RE1 are to contribute to the alleviation of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and to contribute to the regional target of 12% energy generation from renewable energy sources by 2012, and 40% by 2025.

While the draft supplementary planning guidance is a material consideration in line with provisions of paragraph 50 of PPS 1 'General Principles', limited weight is given to its contents until such times it is published in final form.

Renewable Energy Developments

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment for her assessment of the impact that the current draft supplementary planning guidance for Planning Policy Statement 18 will have on the Executive's 2012 and 2025 renewable energy targets. (AQW 6462/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The draft guidance is intended to assist developers in identifying sites for wind energy development as well as defining the type of development that may be most suitable in landscape and visual terms. It is also intended to inform planners' judgements on the impacts and acceptability of proposed wind energy developments in landscape and visual.

The draft guidance provides amplification on landscape issues for wind energy proposals assessed under Policy RE 1 of draft PPS18. Two of the main objectives behind policy RE1 are to contribute to the alleviation of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and to contribute to the regional target of 12% energy generation from renewable energy sources by 2012, and 40% by 2025.

While the draft supplementary planning guidance is a material consideration in line with provisions of paragraph 50 of PPS 1 'General Principles', limited weight is given to its contents until such times it is published in final form.

Wind Farm Applications

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, pursuant to AQO 3130/08, (i) the number of wind farm applications awaiting decision for 24 months or longer; (ii) the number of wind farm applications awaiting decision for 12 months or longer; and (iii) the total planning fees associated with the 50 applications that are awaiting decision. (AQW 6507/08)

The Minister of the Environment:

- (i) 18 applications are currently awaiting determination for 24 months or longer.
- (ii) 16 applications are waiting for determination for longer than 12 months (but less than 24 months).
- (iii) In total, 49 applications are awaiting determination. The total planning fees submitted for these applications is £375,890.00

Litter Free Zones

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm if the 11 new councils will have the powers to designate whole council areas as litter free zones. (AQW 6526/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Under the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 councils can designate specified areas of land in their districts as litter control areas. The Order does not provide for the designation of litter free zones, however, for all practical purposes, litter control areas and litter free zones are very similar concepts. Examples of the type of land that can be designated as litter control areas include car parks, shopping precincts, land used as

a cinema, sports grounds, business or office parks and industrial estates. If such land is not kept clear of litter the council can serve a litter abatement notice requiring the litter to be cleared.

Statutory guidance on the Litter Order defines standards of cleanliness which are achievable in different types of location and under differing circumstances, to ensure uniformity of standards across all district council areas. For example, under the guidance a Category 1 Zone means that so far as is practicable, in town centres, shopping centres, shopping streets, major transport centres and other public places where large numbers of people congregate a Grade A standard of cleanliness should be achieved after cleaning - Grade A essentially means no litter. However, the guidance also recognises that practicability is very important and on some occasions it will simply not be possible to achieve certain standards of cleanliness.

Under the Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda my officials have considered litter legislation and guidance generally with a view to bringing forward proposals for stronger legislative powers and updated guidance covering acceptable standards of cleanliness within council areas to help councils to deal with litter problems more effectively. I am considering how best to progress and prioritise this work in the context of the overall work pressures and major environmental issues facing my Department. In the meantime, however, the present powers in respect of litter control areas will continue to be available to all district councils.

Bin Fine Policy

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail each council that has developed a bin fine policy. (AQW 6541/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As you are aware, on 7 April 2008 my Department introduced new powers for district councils in Northern Ireland to issue fixed penalty notices of £100 for 'low level' waste receptacle offences, such as putting the wrong materials in recycling bins.

This does not compel individual councils to introduce fixed penalties - each council is free to decide whether this system would suit its own local circumstances. However, information on which, if any, of the 26 councils have decided to introduce a bin fine policy is not held centrally by my Department.

Planning Applications

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications made in the Omagh District in relation to (i) agricultural diversification; and (ii) economic schemes, at

residential dwellings, broken down by approvals and refusals, for (a) the 24 months prior to 16 March 2006; and (b) 16 March 2006 to 31 March 2008, giving the reasons for refusals. (AQW 6554/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret that the Planning Service's current IT system does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested. Accurate figures for the periods in question could only be provided through a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost.

Planning Applications

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of residential planning applications made in the Omagh District, broken down by approvals and refusals, for (i) the 24 months prior to 16 March 2006; and (ii) 16 March 2006 to 31 March 2008, giving the reasons for refusals. (AQW 6555/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The number of residential planning applications made in the Omagh District in 2006/07 was 487. The number of decisions issued for residential developments in the same year for Omagh District was 1,253 of which 892 were approved and 361 refused, with an approval rate of 71.2 %. Due to the substantive content and volume involved with detailing the reasons for refusal I shall write to you separately with the details.

Statistical data outside the 2006/07 period is not available at present due to the new statistical reporting system outlined in my letter to Members in December 2007. Information for the 24 months prior to the 16th March 2006 will be available by the end of October 2008. Information for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 will be available by the end of May 2008.

Planning Applications

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, further to AQW 6134/08, and in reference to Planning Application X/2007/0964/F, to detail the representation received following the Ards Borough Council meeting; and to give a timescale within which the application will be completed. (AQW 6578/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The issues raised in the representation include, in the main, the weight attached by the case officer to policies draft PPS4 – Industrial Development – and draft PPS14 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside, the problems resulting from the increase in the anticipated traffic and the option of relocating the business to protect the Area Of Natural Beauty (AONB), the Green Belt and the proposed Countryside Policy Area under the draft Ards and Down Area Plan. The

Department does not propose to issue the decision notice until these matters are satisfactorily resolved.

Dog Fouling

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fines issued for dog fouling in each of the 26 local government districts in each of the last three years. (AQW 6594/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The information for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 years is set out in the table below. My Department has already requested the 2007/08 year figures from all 26 district councils and I will let you have these as soon as they become available.

Council	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 05 to 31 March 06	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 06 to 31 March 07
Antrim BC	2	1
Ards BC	14	5
Armagh City & DC	0	0
Ballymena BC	2	3
Ballymoney BC	0	0
Banbridge DC	0	2
Belfast CC	234	143
Carrickfergus BC	1	4
Castlereagh BC	3	2
Coleraine BC	10	10
Cookstown DC	1	0
Craigavon BC	5	9
Derry CC	0	0
Down DC	6	4
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	0	0
Fermanagh DC	0	0
Larne BC	10	14
Limavady BC	2	0
Lisburn CC	2	1
Magherafelt DC	0	4
Moyle DC	1	0
Newry & Mourne DC	0	0
Newtownabbey BC	7	90
North Down BC	14	6
Omagh DC	0	14

Council	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 05 to 31 March 06	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 06 to 31 March 07
Strabane DC	0	0
Totals	314	312

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Ground Rents

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his plans to commence the existing statutory provisions in relation to the compulsory redemption of ground rents. (AQW 5405/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): As you know, the Ground Rents Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 provides for both a voluntary and a compulsory ground rent redemption scheme. The voluntary redemption scheme ("VRS") was commenced on 29 July 2002 and it was agreed that the compulsory redemption scheme would not be commenced until the operation of the VRS had been assessed, reflecting discussions which had taken place during the passage of the Act through the Assembly.

A review of the operation of the VRS has been duly completed and we are aiming to publish the outcome of the review in June 2008.

At this stage I am not inclined to introduce the compulsory redemption provisions. However I would wish to fully consider the Analysis of the Responses to the Review prior to making any final decision in this regard.

I shall of course keep you and other interested parties apprised of any further developments in relation to this matter.

Unpaid Rates

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total amount of unpaid rates which were written off as 'uncollectable debt' in each of the last five years (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by local council area. (AQW 6096/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Details of unpaid rates written off as uncollectable debt in each of the last five years, (i) in total and (ii) broken down by local council area can be found in the attached table.

TOTAL AMOUNT OF UNPAID RATES WRITTEN OFF AS ‘UNCOLLECTABLE DEBT’ IN EACH OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS IN TOTAL AND BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

	2003(04)	2004(05)	2005(06)	2006(07)	2007(08)
Antrim	38,935.07	55,510.47	103,871.85	30,784.06	42,752.58
Ards	20,319.72	59,579.69	27,647.97	19,348.96	28,033.25
Armagh	42,556.06	8,236.45	53,143.96	37,162.20	(8,098.39)
Ballymena	36,695.84	52,850.86	21,619.89	85,354.06	(2,163.50)
Ballymoney	9,364.15	20,364.03	25,190.35	588.50	1,169.90
Banbridge	30,334.69	13,902.71	5,348.08	13,723.69	7,720.99
Belfast	868,139.42	795,237.00	444,862.47	388,977.94	338,922.97
Carrickfergus	21,738.01	64,491.23	18,144.94	3,912.09	15,225.30
Castlereagh	89,662.10	36,542.18	25,629.66	29,916.69	13,631.12
Coleraine	46,658.06	5,888.36	96,125.47	26,937.56	(18,781.21)
Cookstown	22,680.80	3,703.19	12,474.78	10,220.74	38,270.57
Craigavon	105,937.15	51,026.37	114,702.91	27,100.74	(18,384.58)
Downpatrick	41,956.95	57,353.86	8,801.04	27,783.86	9,892.50
Dungannon	18,396.67	5,715.95	17,537.93	37,384.26	15,040.46
Fermanagh	30,400.45	46,116.44	50,913.45	11,021.68	2,863.56
Larne	28,302.87	26,949.17	37,601.17	19,503.55	18,257.96
Limavady	25,746.58	51,438.76	(6,992.00)	16,638.14	(9,411.07)
Lisburn	113,714.76	119,620.23	92,047.12	83,948.92	49,531.67
Derry	85,759.35	98,969.06	91,226.12	138,432.28	73,372.02
Magherafelt	41,341.46	14,338.54	28,438.39	863.90	(16,957.38)
Moyle	12,014.94	(30,388.74)	(324.11)	5,123.54	14,059.72
Newry	99,696.27	60,855.90	65,152.48	86,707.79	13,290.21
Newtownabbey	103,601.62	140,432.39	37,000.68	27,873.54	13,799.97
North down	80,940.27	112,161.75	106,110.89	125,950.54	(8,087.48)
Omagh	6,571.49	5,798.06	32,403.22	23,949.13	16,225.27
Strabane	20,699.07	25,671.55	30,143.61	6,657.79	(947.28)
	2,042,163.82	1,902,365.46	1,538,822.32	1,285,866.15	629,229.13

* 2007/2008 – Provisional Figures

** Normally debt losses in any year exceed monies recovered but in some years the monies recovered exceeded losses in certain district council Areas. This outcome is shown in brackets.

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how much his department has spent on equality impact assessments and consultations over the last three years.

(AQW 6173/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Over the last 3 years my Department has carried out Equality Impact Assessments on policies relating to Recruitment and Promotion, Account NI, HRConnect, Rating Reform and Workplace 2010.

These assessments have formed part of the overall policy development and subsequent consultations and costs have been borne from existing budget allocations. It is not therefore possible to identify costs relating to the assessments or the equality aspects of consultations.

New Computers

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures he is taking to ensure value

for money in the purchase of new computers, as announced on 9 April 2008. (AQW 6206/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In line with public procurement policy, the Department of Finance & Personnel's Delivery and Innovation Division (DID) engaged Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to undertake a competitive tendering process to put in place contracts for the supply and installation of new desktop and laptop PCs for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). This covers the purchase of the new computers that I announced on 9 April 2008.

The awarded contracts conform to the NICS's ICT strategy which consolidates the individual desktop and laptop PC procurement activities from across the NICS, allowing the Service to standardise on the desktop and laptop savings across the board. This will reduce the total cost of ownership in relation to supportability and management of the ICT estate across the NICS. In addition, the laptops procured through the contract will allow the NICS to deploy Microsoft Vista with Bitlocker in a manner that fulfils the NICS's obligations in relation to data security and laptops.

The tendering process involved running a secondary competition off the current IT Hardware Framework. The companies whose proposals successfully passed the qualitative analysis phase of the process were invited to participate in a reverse e-auction to drive down the unit cost.

The terms of the contract are such that if the supplier upgrades the model of PC offered during the life of the contract they are expected to provide the new model with the increased specification at the price point agreed during the e-auction. If an increased specification is not required, the supplier will revise their unit costs of the static specification, reducing it to reflect the falling cost of technology throughout the life of the contract.

Using the competitive tendering process and associated e-auction the NICS has ensured that it has achieved best Value for Money.

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by his department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) he is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6211/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Since 8 May 2007, I have flown business class or its equivalent

classification on 14 occasions in my capacity as Finance Minister. The total cost of these journeys was £4,340.20 (includes a return journey to the US). I am not involved in decisions about what class I fly but I understand that it is established practice that I travel business class to enable me to work on Departmental business up to and during each flight.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002.

(AQW 6248/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department has not sold any land in the North Down constituency since 2002.

Expenditure on Consultants

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how the expenditure of £111 million on consultants from now until 2011 will achieve value for money, best practice and added value.

(AQW 6303/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Before any consultancy projects can be taken forward, a business case must be prepared setting out the need for the assignment, the outputs expected and the project management arrangements. Only where the justification for using consultants demonstrates value for money will the business case be approved. All cases with a value over £75k must obtain DFP approval. In addition, all assignments should be competitively tendered and let through a Centre of Procurement Expertise and the relevant Framework Agreement, unless an Accounting Officer can justify otherwise. Whilst the figure referred to accounts for a very small percentage of total spend I recognise it represents a significant amount. I therefore welcome the fact that DFP has committed, in response to a recent Public Accounts Committee report, to working with departments to manage expenditure on consultancy and to build up in-house capacity and capability.

Departmental Correspondence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically.

(AQW 6380/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not currently have any mechanisms in place to electronically monitor the amount of internal and external correspondence or publications distributed by staff. However, all staff are aware of the DFP Waste Management Action Plan and, in line with this, printing should not be carried out unless it is completely necessary and no other alternative is available.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Dental Service

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the support available from his department to a parent of a child requiring a dentist, where there is great difficulty in accessing dental facilities in their local area. (AQW 6170/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): There are currently no contractual arrangements in place to compel

dentists to accept any patient for health service treatment. However, in the majority of cases, dental practices are still continuing to provide health service dental care provision for children and exempt adults. Child dental registrations have remained constant over the past 4 years.

My officials are working with the British Dental Association in negotiating a new contract, which we anticipate will ease access problems in those areas where they currently exist. In the meantime, Dental Directors in the Health and Social Services Boards will assist patients who are experiencing access problems, where possible.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6182/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department sold 11.04 acres at Rathgael, Bangor to the former Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust (now South Eastern HSC Trust) on 24 October 2005. The price – as assessed by the then Valuation and Lands Agency (now Land and Property Services) – was £2.5 millions.

The Trust required the land for the provision of Secure Accommodation for Young People.

Attacks on Staff

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the total number of attacks on Western Health and Social Care Trust staff from 1 April 2007 to 2 April 2008; and (ii) the actions he is taking to prevent such attacks. (AQW 6186/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were a total of 753 physical attacks on Western Health and Social Care Trust staff from 1 April 2007 to 2 April 2008.

Since I launched the Zero Tolerance campaign in June 2007 and subsequently put in place accountability arrangements for staff safety, a number of additional measures have been introduced. These include: a publicity campaign in which posters and floor graphics have been placed in strategic areas of hospitals; the distribution of 12,000 personal alarms; a review of training provisions for staff and the close monitoring of violent incidents. I also intend to propose the introduction of specific legislation to protect healthcare workers.

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of reported pregnancies of girls aged under 17 years in 2007, and to detail how this figure compares to ten years ago. (AQW 6187/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to provide information on the number of teenage pregnancies in Northern Ireland, as the number of pregnancies is not recorded.

The number of births to mothers aged under 17 years, registered in Northern Ireland, in each of the last ten years are shown in the table below.

Table: Number of births and stillbirths registered in Northern Ireland to women aged under 17 years, 1997-2007

Registration Year	All Births*
1997	191
1998	204
1999	213
2000	221
2001	169
2002	150
2003	155
2004	172

Registration Year	All Births*
2005	144
2006	149
2007P	142

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Notes:

^P Data for 2007 remains provisional until the publication of the 2007 Annual Report of the Registrar General due to be published at the end of 2008.

* The number of births refers to all live and still births to women aged 16 and under at the time of birth and resident in Northern Ireland. Pregnancies resulting in multiple births are counted only once.

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by his department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) he is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6210/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have flown business class on four occasions since taking up office in May 2007. The total cost incurred by my department for these journeys was £1,210.35.

It is standard practice to fly business class. I will fly economy class when it is not necessary for me to work on the flight.

Childcare Services

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the school age childcare services that were previously funded during the 2007-08 financial year which as of yet have to be allocated similar levels of funding to enable them to continue throughout 2008-09. (AQW 6224/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Policy responsibility for Childcare transferred from my Department to the Department of Education in November 2006. Since November 2006, DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young Peoples Package monies has been solely to act as a funding mechanism for centrally earmarked resources. Even though this funding arrangement and DHSSPS remit ended on 31 March 2008, I have extended funding to afterschool groups until 30 June 2008, using my own

resources, to enable them to continue until the end of the school year.

Funding allocated during 2007/08 and up to 30 June 2008 to afterschool projects by DHSSPS is detailed in the attached Annex A.

ANNEX A

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Chinese Welfare Assoc. ASC Martin Napier Chinese Welfare Association, 133-135 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP	£10,242.50	£2,561
Cool Kids ASC Melissa Butler St Joseph's Primary School, 42 Castle Street, Lisburn BT27 4XE	£13,772.50	£3,443
Glencraig ASC Deirdre Kelly Glencraig ASC, 16a Old Seahill Road Holywood BT18 0EG	£10,021	£2,505
Ionad Uibh Eachach Mairin McClafferty Ionad Uibh Eachach Cumann Iarscoile, 34 Iveagh Crescent Belfast BT12 6AW	£13,576	£3,394
Lisbane ASC Joanne Bailey Lisbarnett & Lisbane Community Assoc Ltd, 16 Lisbarnett Road Lisbane Comber BT23 6AW	£7,252.50	£1,813
Oakwood Integrated OOSH Oakwood Integrated Children's Centre, 48 The Cutts Derriaghy Co. Antrim BT17 9HN	£9,876.50	£2,469
Draperstown ASC Workspace, The Business Centre, Tobermore Road, Draperstown BT45 7AG	£25,019	£6,255
Scout Hall AS Childcare Club Annemarie Downey Downpatrick Group Scouting Ireland, The Scout Hall, Thomas Russell Park, Downpatrick BT30 6NH	£17,368.50	£4,342

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Tullymore AS Project Upper Andersonstown Community Forum, 37a Tullymore Gardens Belfast BT11 8NE	£12,325	£3,081
Camowen Smart Kids Partnership Cari-Leigh Coyle Camowen Partnership Ltd, Unit 1 Termon Business Park, Carrickmore BT79 9AL Administer awards to: Carrickmore ASC Sixmilecross ASC Loughmacrory ASC	£12,182 £12,182 £12,182	£3,046 £3,046 £3,046
Club United ASC Elaine Campbell Club United After Schools Club, Unit 1 Glendermott Valley Business Park Church Brae Derry BT47 3QR	£12,581	£3,145
Creggan Underdeck out of schools club Old Library Trust Health Living Centre, Rath Mor Business Park, Blighs Lane Creggan BT48 0LZ	£13,134	£3,284
Drumahoe Childcare LTD Drumahoe out of schools club, Lisneal College Grounds, 35 Drumahoe Road BT47 3SD	£16,057.50	£4,014
Zero-8-Teen Totz 'n' Teenz Child & Playcare Complex, Moylinn House, Legahory Centre Brownlow Craigavon BT65 5BE	£16,340	£4,085
Laughterland OOSC Pat Downey Laughterland OOSC, The Unit, Black Park Road, Toomebridge BT41 3SL	£11,040	£2,760
Kids Inn Out of Schools Club Kids Inn Out of Schools Club, Vale Centre, Greysteel BT47 3GE	£12,304	£3,076
Naiscoil Na Rinne Club na Nog Naiscoil na Rinne, 33 Cramore Gardens, Creggan Estate, Derry BT48 9TF	£13,192	£3,298

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Pomeroy ASC Patricia O'Gara Pomeroy ASC, 5 Cavanakeenan Road, Pomeroy Dungannon BT70 2SD	£16,292.50	£4,073
Rasharkin Time Out ASC Rasharkin Women's Group, 22/23 Bamford Park, Rasharkin BT44 8RX	£10,853	£2,713
Skools Out Club Maria Magill Larne Community Centre, 1-5 Doric Way, Larne BT40 2BH	£12,957	£3,239
Kidsview OOSC Slievegallion Rural Development Association, 62B Longfield Road, Desertmartin Magherafelt BT45 5LS	£12,112.50	£3,028
Teemore ASC Rosemary Clarkson Teemore After Schools Club, St Mary's Hall, Teemore Cross Derrylin Enniskillen BT92 9BL	£14,513.50	£3,628
Oasis ASC Suzanne Humphries Oasis Caring in Action Ltd, 102-108 Castlereagh Street, Belfast BT5 4NJ	£12,103	£3,026
Fivemiletown ASC Glenda Campbell Fivemiletown Community Development Association, Units 2 - 5 The Buttermarket, 132 Main Street, Fivemiletown BT75 0PW	£12,631	£3,158
Short Strand Playcare Project Patricia Johnston Short Strand Community Forum, 26a Beechfield Street Belfast BT5 4EQ	£10,864	£2,716
Vine ASC Lisa McClements The Vine Centre, 193 Crumlin Road Belfast BT147DX	£12,735	£3,184
An Droichead Brid Duffy An Droichead Cumann Iarscoile, 20 Cooke Street, Belfast BT7 2EP	£11,163	£2,791

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Ardoyne ASC Elaine Johnston Ardoyne ASC, Old Beltex Mill, Flax Street Belfast BT147EJ	£10,000	£2,500
Beechmount AS Programme Francine Moore Beechmount Community Project, 2nd Floor, Blackie Building 43 Beechmount Pass Belfast BT127NW	£15,864	£3,966
Bloomfield Playcare Joanne McCarten Bloomfield Community Association, 60 Hyndford Street Belfast BT5 5EN	£7,643	£1,911
Erne East Afterschools Initiative Erne East Community Partnership Ltd, The Basement, No 1 Main Street, Roslea BT927PP Administer awards to: Erne East – Derry Gannon ASC Erne East – Donagh ASC Erne East – Brookeborough ASC	£7,348.50 £9,215 £8,312	£1,837 £2,304 £2,078
Kesh ASC Glenduuagh Childcare Services, Mantlin Road, Kesh BT931TU	£7,327	£1,832
Carryduff ASC Iris Warnock Carryduff Playcare, 20a Church Road Carryduff BT8 8DT	£13,960.50	£3,490
Nest Afterschools Cluady Rural Development, The Diamond Centre Claudy BT474EF	£11,738.50	£2,935
Rascals Playstation Rascals Playstation Childcare Centre, 20 Enniskillen Road Ballinamallard BT942ER	£12,122	£3,030
Strabane out of school club Strabane and District Playclub c/o NWIFHE 39 Derry Road Strabane BT828DX	£12,963	£3,241

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Strathroy ASC (Crackerjack) Strathroy Community Centre Drumlea Crescent Strathroy BT797XE	£11,938	£2,984
Sugar & Spice Playcare Club Samantha Armstrong Sugar & Spice Playcare Club, Units 7 & 8 Enterprise Centre, Castlederg Rd Drumquin Omagh BT784PH	£14,000	£3,500
Mountainview Society of St Vincent De Paul Kay Shortt Unit 12 Mountainview Centre, Norglen Gardens Belfast BT118EL	£14,453	£3,613
Geoff Kerr 174 Afterschool Project 174 Trust, Duncairn Complex, Duncairn venue Belfast BT146BP	£13,126	£3,282
Bluegrass ASC Fran Travers Bluegrass After School Club, 67F Rosemount Factory, Rosemount Avenue Derry BT480HL	£13,165	£3,291
Play Links Veronica Sloan Strangford & District ASC, The Playing Fields, The Links Strangford BT327NB	£16,178.50	£4,045
PlayBoard Maura Moore PlayBoard, 59-65 York Street Belfast BT151AA	£47,132	£11,783
Funtime ASC Funtime After School Club, C/O 14 Jade Business Park, Jonesborough Newry BT358JP	£13,096	£3,274
Kids United Stephanie Curran Kids United Playcare Facilities, Brownstown Community Centre, 9 Brownstows Park Portadown BT623PP	£13,885	£3,471
Just Kids OOSC Joanne Hogg Family Caring Centre, 2-5 Somerset Park, Antrim BT412TE	£17,301.50	£4,325

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Kidz Lodge Mary Quinn Magherafelt Women's Group Ltd, 27-29 Honeymore Road, Magherafelt BT456AG	£10,352	£2,588
Kilrea ASC St Vincent De Paul, 52 Maghera Street, Kilrea BT515QN	£13,952.50	£3,488
Cairde Bhunscoil Feirste Cairde Cumann Iarscoile, 44 Rosgoill Park, Belfast BT119QS	£13,864.50	£3,466
Loughiel OOSC Loughiel Out of School Club, Loughiel Road Loughiel BT449JN	£16,190	£4,047
Ballymac Playzone Ballymac Centre 1A Fraser Pass Lower Newtownards Road Belfast BT1 1BP	£59,000	£14,750
Total	£781,000	£195,250

Childcare Services

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) all school age childcare projects that were entitled or received funding during 2007-08, and the amount allocated to each; and (ii) the amount of funding that has been allocated to each, to date, during 2008-09.

(AQW 6225/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Policy responsibility for Childcare transferred from my Department to the Department of Education in November 2006. Since November 2006, DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young Peoples Package monies has been solely to act as a funding mechanism for centrally earmarked resources. Even though this funding arrangement and DHSSPS remit ended on 31 March 2008, I have extended funding to afterschool groups until 30 June 2008, using my own resources, to enable them to continue until the end of the school year.

Funding allocated during 2007/08 and up to 30 June 2008 to afterschool projects by DHSSPS is detailed in the attached Annex A.

ANNEX A

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Chinese Welfare Assoc. ASC Martin Napier Chinese Welfare Association, 133-135 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP	£10,242.50	£2,561
Cool Kids ASC Melissa Butler St Joseph's Primary School, 42 Castle Street, Lisburn BT27 4XE	£13,772.50	£3,443
Glencraig ASC Deirdre Kelly Glencraig ASC, 16a Old Seahill Road Holywood BT18 0EG	£10,021	£2,505
Ionad Uibh Eachach Mairin McClafferty Ionad Uibh Eachach Cumann Iarscoile, 34 Iveagh Crescent Belfast BT12 6AW	£13,576	£3,394
Lisbane ASC Joanne Bailey Lisbarnett & Lisbane Community Assoc Ltd, 16 Lisbarnett Road Lisbane Comber BT23 6AW	£7,252.50	£1,813
Oakwood Integrated OOSH Oakwood Integrated Children's Centre, 48 The Cutts Derriaghy Co. Antrim BT17 9HN	£9,876.50	£2,469
Draperstown ASC Workspace, The Business Centre, Tobermore Road, Draperstown BT45 7AG	£25,019	£6,255
Scout Hall AS Childcare Club Annemarie Downey Downpatrick Group Scouting Ireland, The Scout Hall, Thomas Russell Park, Downpatrick BT30 6NH	£17,368.50	£4,342
Tullymore AS Project Upper Andersonstown Community Forum, 37a Tullymore Gardens Belfast BT11 8NE	£12,325	£3,081

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Camowen Smart Kids Partnership Cari-Leigh Coyle Camowen Partnership Ltd, Unit 1 Termon Business Park, Carrickmore BT79 9AL Administer awards to: Carrickmore ASC Sixmilecross ASC Loughmacrory ASC	£12,182 £12,182 £12,182	£3,046 £3,046 £3,046
Club United ASC Elaine Campbell Club United After Schools Club, Unit 1 Glendermott Valley Business Park Church Brae Derry BT47 3QR	£12,581	£3,145
Creggan Underdeck out of schools club Old Library Trust Health Living Centre, Rath Mor Business Park, Blighs Lane Creggan BT48 0LZ	£13,134	£3,284
Drumahoe Childcare LTD Drumahoe out of schools club, Lisneal College Grounds, 35 Drumahoe Road BT47 3SD	£16,057.50	£4,014
Zero-8-Teen Totz 'n' Teenz Child & Playcare Complex, Moylinn House, Legahory Centre Brownlow Craigavon BT65 5BE	£16,340	£4,085
Laughterland OOSC Pat Downey Laughterland OOSC, The Unit, Black Park Road, Toomebridge BT41 3SL	£11,040	£2,760
Kids Inn Out of Schools Club Kids Inn Out of Schools Club, Vale Centre, Greysteel BT47 3GE	£12,304	£3,076
Naiscoil Na Rinne Club na Nog Naiscoil na Rinne, 33 Cramore Gardens, Creggan Estate, Derry BT48 9TF	£13,192	£3,298

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Pomeroy ASC Patricia O'Gara Pomeroy ASC, 5 Cavanakeenan Road, Pomeroy Dungannon BT70 2SD	£16,292.50	£4,073
Rasharkin Time Out ASC Rasharkin Women's Group, 22/23 Bamford Park, Rasharkin BT44 8RX	£10,853	£2,713
Skools Out Club Maria Magill Larne Community Centre, 1-5 Doric Way, Larne BT40 2BH	£12,957	£3,239
Kidsview OOSC Slievegallion Rural Development Association, 62B Longfield Road, Desertmartin Magherafelt BT45 5LS	£12,112.50	£3,028
Teemore ASC Rosemary Clarkson Teemore After Schools Club, St Mary's Hall, Teemore Cross Derrylin Enniskillen BT92 9BL	£14,513.50	£3,628
Oasis ASC Suzanne Humphries Oasis Caring in Action Ltd, 102-108 Castlereagh Street, Belfast BT5 4NJ	£12,103	£3,026
Fivemiletown ASC Glenda Campbell Fivemiletown Community Development Association, Units 2 - 5 The Buttermarket, 132 Main Street, Fivemiletown BT75 0PW	£12,631	£3,158
Short Strand Playcare Project Patricia Johnston Short Strand Community Forum, 26a Beechfield Street Belfast BT5 4EQ	£10,864	£2,716
Vine ASC Lisa McClements The Vine Centre, 193 Crumlin Road Belfast BT147DX	£12,735	£3,184
An Droichead Brid Duffy An Droichead Cumann Iarscoile, 20 Cooke Street, Belfast BT7 2EP	£11,163	£2,791

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Ardoyne ASC Elaine Johnston Ardoyne ASC, Old Beltex Mill, Flax Street Belfast BT147EJ	£10,000	£2,500
Beechmount AS Programme Francine Moore Beechmount Community Project, 2nd Floor, Blackie Building 43 Beechmount Pass Belfast BT127NW	£15,864	£3,966
Bloomfield Playcare Joanne McCarten Bloomfield Community Association, 60 Hyndford Street Belfast BT5 5EN	£7,643	£1,911
Erne East Afterschools Initiative Erne East Community Partnership Ltd, The Basement, No 1 Main Street, Roslea BT927PP Administer awards to:Erne East – Derry Gannon ASC Erne East – Donagh ASC Erne East – Brookeborough ASC	£7,348.50 £9,215 £8,312	£1,837 £2,304 £2,078
Kesh ASC Glenduuagh Childcare Services, Mantlin Road, Kesh BT931TU	£7,327	£1,832
Carryduff ASC Iris Warnock Carryduff Playcare, 20a Church Road Carryduff BT8 8DT	£13,960.50	£3,490
Nest Afterschools Cluady Rural Development, The Diamond Centre Claudy BT474EF	£11,738.50	£2,935
Rascals Playstation Rascals Playstation Childcare Centre, 20 Enniskillen Road Ballinamallard BT942ER	£12,122	£3,030
Strabane out of school club Strabane and District Playclub c/o NWIFHE 39 Derry Road Strabane BT828DX	£12,963	£3,241
Strathroy ASC (Crackerjack) Strathroy Community Centre Drumlea Crescent Strathroy BT797XE	£11,938	£2,984

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Sugar & Spice Playcare Club Samantha Armstrong Sugar & Spice Playcare Club, Units 7 & 8 Enterprise Centre, Castleberg Rd Drumquin Omagh BT784PH	£14,000	£3,500
Mountainview Society of St Vincent De Paul Kay Shortt Unit 12 Mountainview Centre, Norglen Gardens Belfast BT118EL	£14,453	£3,613
Geoff Kerr 174 Afterschool Project 174 Trust, Duncairn Complex, Duncairn Avenue Belfast BT146BP	£13,126	£3,282
Bluegrass ASC Fran Travers Bluegrass After School Club, 67F Rosemount Factory, Rosemount Avenue Derry BT480HL	£13,165	£3,291
Play Links Veronica Sloan Strangford & District ASC, The Playing Fields, The Links Strangford BT327NB	£16,178.50	£4,045
PlayBoard Maura Moore PlayBoard, 59-65 York Street Belfast BT151AA	£47,132	£11,783
Funtime ASC Funtime After School Club, C/O 14 Jade Business Park, Jonesborough Newry BT358JP	£13,096	£3,274
Kids United Stephanie Curran Kids United Playcare Facilities, Brownstown Community Centre, 9 Brownstows Park Portadown BT623PP	£13,885	£3,471
Just Kids OOSC Joanne Hogg Family Caring Centre, 2-5 Somerset Park, Antrim BT412TE	£17,301.50	£4,325
Kidz Lodge Mary Quinn Magherafelt Women's Group Ltd, 27-29 Honeymore Road, Magherafelt BT456AG	£10,352	£2,588

After-school Organisation	1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008
Kilrea ASC St Vincent De Paul, 52 Maghera Street, Kilrea BT515QN	£13,952.50	£3,488
Cairde Bhunscoil Feirste Cairde Cumann Iarscoile, 44 Rosgoill Park, Belfast BT119QS	£13,864.50	£3,466
Loughiel OOSC Loughiel Out of School Club, Loughiel Road Loughiel BT449JN	£16,190	£4,047
Ballymac Playzone Ballymac Centre 1A Fraser Pass Lower Newtownards Road Belfast BT1 1BP	£59,000	£14,750
Total	£781,000	£195,250

Epilepsy Sufferers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who suffer from epilepsy. (AQW 6232/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mental Health

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who suffer from mental health problems. (AQW 6233/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested.

Hip Replacements

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who have had hip replacements, for each of the last 3 years. (AQW 6236/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who have had hip replacements in each of the last three years is not available.

It is however possible to provide the number of hip replacement procedures carried out in Health and

Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, in each of the last 3 years for which information is available.

Year	Number of procedures
2006/2007	2,076
2005/2006	1,740
2004/2005	1,758

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Note: It is possible that any individual could receive more than one hip replacement procedure during a year, or over a number of years, and will thus be counted more than once in the figures above.

Blind Registration

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people currently registered as blind. (AQW 6238/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people currently registered as blind is not collected centrally.

Health Service Neurologists

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of neurologists currently working in the Health Service. (AQW 6239/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: According to the Health & Social Care Trusts, there are 12 consultant neurologists currently working in the Health Service.

Breast Screening Units

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, in relation to mobile Breast Screening units from 1 March to 1 April 2008, (i) the number of mobiles operating on each working day; (ii) the number of staff operating in each mobile; (iii) where they were located; and (iv) the number of patients screened in each mobile unit on each day. (AQW 6243/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On average there was one mobile operating on each week day from 1 March to 1 April 2008 with at least two members of staff in each. These mobiles were situated at the Ards Community Hospital, the Mid Ulster Hospital and the Omagh Leisure Centre.

The mobile unit at the Ards Community Hospital screened between 43 to 50 patients each day, the Mid

Ulster Hospital screened between 25 to 54 and the mobile at the Omagh Leisure Centre screened between 45 to 78 patients daily.

People with Disabilities

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the targets his department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in his department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6265/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This Department does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Occupational Therapists

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of occupational therapists; and (ii) the average waiting time for an assessment by an occupational therapist, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6267/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: (i) Information is not available in the form requested.

(ii) Information on the average waiting time for an assessment by an Occupational Therapist is not collected centrally.

Diabetes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the programmes; and (ii) the support, his department is giving to (a) diagnosing diabetes; and (b) supporting people with diabetes. (AQW 6270/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Draft Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing will be issued for consultation shortly. This Framework includes a section on diabetes and sets out the standards of care and support that patients with diabetes can expect to receive from their multidisciplinary healthcare team.

There are no plans to introduce population screening for diabetes in Northern Ireland. However, health professionals will identify patients at high risk of having diabetes in the context of treating a range of health conditions, including when assessing the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Diabetic Retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness and visual impairment in Northern Ireland. The Retinopathy Screening Programme is available to all people with diabetes over the age of 12 in Northern Ireland.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff cutbacks in (i) managerial staff; (ii) catering staff; (iii) domestic staff; (iv) porters; (v) telephonists; (vi) groundsmen; and (vii) joinery and maintenance staff, since the formation of the new South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 6275/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust advises that there have been reductions of 22 whole-time equivalent managerial staff since the formation of the Trust. There have been no further changes in any of the other requested staff groups.

Community Nurses

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQO 2702/08, to detail his department's plans to increase the numbers of community nurses in the Lagan Valley constituency. (AQW 6277/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources. The South Eastern Trust currently has no plans to increase the number of Community nursing posts in the Lagan Valley Constituency.

Fire Stations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the total number of days that each fire station had an appliance out of service owing to repairs in each of the last three years. (AQW 6281/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Fire and Rescue Appliances

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the procedure for the replacement of fire and rescue appliances.
(AQW 6283/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The NI Fire and Rescue Service monitors the age and condition of all fire appliances at each fire station across Northern Ireland to ensure the best use of resources. When an appliance reaches the end of its life span, either due to age or condition, it is replaced. The replacement will be either a brand new fire appliance, or an existing one from another fire station which has received a new fire appliance. New Fire Appliances are allocated to fire stations based on a combination of risk analysis, volume of usage and the condition of the existing appliances

Departmental Land

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the land and acreage belonging to the department, and the plans for this land.
(AQW 6311/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department currently owns land and property, commonly known as DHSSPS retained estate, with a total acreage of 687 acres. Details of the holdings are outlined in the attached Appendix.

The Department is considering future plans for this land and property in accordance with the advice/recommendation of Land and Property Services (formerly Valuation and Lands Agency). This is a statutory requirement and ensures that disposals are optimised and best price achieved.

APPENDIX

Land at Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Belfast	138 acres
Land at Gransha/Stradreagh Hospital, Londonderry	250 acres
Land at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, Omagh	136.5 acres
Land at Downshire Hospital, Downpatrick	77.5 acres
Land At Whiteabbey Hospital	23.7 acres
Land at Drumcoo, Enniskillen	15.96 acres
Land at Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt	6 acres
Land at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast	4.22 acres
Land at Omagh General Hospital, Omagh	1.97 acres
Land at Scroggy Road, Limavady	1.12 acres
Rathfriland Health Centre	0.52 acres
Warrenpoint Health Centre	0.54 acres

Cherryvalley Health Centre	0.30 acres
College of Nursing and Residential Accommodation, Craigavon Area Hospital	4.026 acres
Thomas Street Clinic, Dungannon	0.71 acres
Burnside Family Day Care Centre, Craigavon	0.20 acres
137, 139 and 141 Ormeau Road, Belfast	0.28 acres
Southern Board Headquarters, Tower Hill, Armagh	1.7 acres
Western Board Headquarters, Gransha/Stradreagh Hospital, Londonderry	1.46 acres
Central Services Agency, Franklin Street, Belfast	0.22 acres
Central Services Agency Store, Boucher Crescent, Belfast	2.35 acres
Eastern Board Headquarters, Linenhall Street, Belfast	0.54 acres
NI Blood Transfusion Centre at Belfast City Hospital	2 acres
The Beeches, Hampton Park, Belfast	0.24 acres
Glasvey Special Care School, Ballykelly	0.93 acres
Hillcroft Special Care School, Newtownabbey	1.8 acres
58 Main Street, Larne	0.20 acres
Bungalow, Tempo Road, Enniskillen	0.13 acres
149 Falls Road, Belfast	0.02 acres
151 Falls Road, Belfast	0.02 acres
Strabane Family Centre	0.44 acres
81 Victoria Avenue, Newtownards	0.10 acres
Derg Valley Hospital	4.27 acres
Lisbarnett Health Clinic, Lisbarnett, Comber	0.15 acres
Omagh General Hospital	1.0 acres
42 Dennett Gardens, L'Derry	0.13 acres
Fort James Children's Home, L'Derry	6.82 acres
New Buildings Health Clinic, L'Derry	0.23 acres
Sion Mills Health Clinic	0.37 acres
24 Pump Street, L'Derry	0.04 acres
63 Clarendon Street, L'Derry	0.03 acres
Park Health Centre, Claudy	0.36 acres

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how much he spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008. (AQW 6317/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department spent £270,583 on publicity and advertising during 2007/08. This expenditure covers costs for example: public notices

and recruitment advertising. It also covers the costs of publicity campaigns which in 2007-08 included:

- Mental Health and Learning Disability Nursing Recruitment
- Zero Tolerance (campaign against attacks on healthcare staff)
- Fireworks Safety (led by the NIO)

Graduate Dentists

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of current vacancies for graduate dentists. (AQW 6336/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has provided additional funding over the last two years to increase the number of graduate dental training places in Northern Ireland from 28 to 40. At present there are 33 trainers in place and work is underway to maximise the capacity available through the recruitment of further trainers.

Voluntary and Community Groups

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give his assessment of those voluntary and community groups that will no longer receive funding in the 2009/2010 financial year and the overall effect this will have on the health service. (AQW 6337/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible at this stage to provide a comprehensive list of those groups that will no longer receive funding in 2009/2010 regardless of whether the source of funds is directly from the Department or via the Boards and Trusts.

Department Correspondence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6381/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department currently operates an electronic publication policy (where statutory/parliamentary constraints permit), which is in line with current best practice and is kept under regular review. Most internal correspondence is now sent electronically and, where possible, external communications are also electronic. Where possible,

greater use and access is made of the Intranet, which is a vital source of internal information for use by all staff within the Department, providing easy access to key Departmental services, and the Internet, which provides general information for staff, members of the public and health professionals. In relation to Departmental publications, specific monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that these are fit for purpose (including electronic where appropriate) and provide value for money.

Free Personal Care

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline progress towards introducing free personal care. (AQW 6383/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I informed the house during my speech in May 2007 that I had commissioned a report on the cost of free personal care and a number of possible alternatives. I am currently considering that analysis. Within the context of my Department's budget settlement, I am working hard to ensure the best possible deal for all the people of Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to provide greater clarification regarding free personal care over the coming weeks.

Genito-Urinary Medicine

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the hospitals that operate Genito-urinary Medicine (GUM) services. (AQW 6409/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics are currently held at Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Causeway Hospital, Daisy Hill Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Source: Return KC60, Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre Northern Ireland (CDSC NI).

Independent Sector

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money spent in each of the last two years on using the independent sector for operations. (AQW 6420/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to my answer to Assembly Question 5391/08 on 17 April 2008.

Hospital Plans

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5549/08, to detail his department's plans for (i) Longstone Hospital; (ii) Mullinure Hospital; and (iii) St Luke's Hospital, Armagh; and to confirm if there will be further ward closures in each of these hospitals within the next 18 months. (AQW 6563/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is working towards the Programme for Government target "that, by 2013, anyone with a mental health problem or learning disability is promptly and suitably treated in the community and no-one remains unnecessarily in hospital." To this end, it is developing community services to allow resettlement of long stay patients and prevent unnecessary admissions, as advocated by the Bamford Report into mental health and learning disability.

Regional Hospital

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his discussions with colleagues at the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in relation to the impact that the proposed new regional hospital to serve Counties Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan will have on the provision of health and social care in Armagh and Down. (AQW 6583/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This issue has not featured in discussions at the North-South Ministerial Council.

My responsibility is to secure acute services for the population of Northern Ireland. The decision on any new hospital for the north east of the Republic of Ireland lies with the authorities in that jurisdiction.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether the general hygiene audit of 15 April 2008 at the Royal Victoria Hospital was an unannounced audit. (AQW 6724/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The environmental cleanliness audit conducted on 15 April was not an unannounced inspection; it was a planned audit conducted under the Cleanliness Matters strategy, whereby Trusts perform regular environmental cleanliness audits in line with the standards recommended by the strategy.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) date; and (ii) findings, of the last general hygiene audit in the first and second floor public areas at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 6726/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The most recent audit was carried out on 30 April 2008 using the audit tool issued with the Regional Environmental Cleanliness Strategy. The overall score from this audit was 81%. This would equate to Band 2 on the established scale, which indicates that the standards are generally satisfactory but there is room for improvement.

The score reflects the impact of the commencement of the construction of the new critical care building on the Royal Hospitals site. This has necessitated the closure of some of the entrances to the Outpatients and ENT buildings, which has resulted in a significant increase in pedestrian traffic through the main Royal Victoria Hospital entrance. In response to the additional pedestrian traffic the Trust is reviewing the cleaning arrangements in public areas. Increased resources have been put in place as an interim measure.

Public Toilets in Hospitals

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether it is a legal requirement to display cleaning charts in public toilets in hospitals. (AQW 6727/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no legal requirement to display cleaning charts in public toilets in hospitals.

Tobacco Products

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm when the age limit will be raised to 18 years in respect to purchasing tobacco products. (AQO 3292/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Later this month I intend to seek Executive colleagues' agreement to legislative proposals that would lead to the age of sale rising to 18. I will then bring the proposals to the Assembly with a view to making the change.

Hip Replacements

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his policy on

providing hip replacements for patients under 60 years of age. (AQO 3221/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A patient's age will not disqualify them from receiving the healthcare they require.

Decisions taken by doctors in relation to medical treatment are determined by clinical factors which take account of an individual patient's condition and circumstances and consider the risks and benefits of particular treatments.

Suicide Prevention

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the action plan implemented by his Department in relation to suicide prevention and awareness. (AQO 3301/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy was published in October 2006. It aims to reduce the local suicide rate by 15% by 2011. The Strategy contains over 60 actions for achieving this aim. Much work has already commenced to implement the Strategy including:

- Establishment of a 24/7 regional crisis prevention helpline, and a pilot self-harm mentoring scheme;
- Provision of community support package funding;
- Research into the effects of the Troubles on suicide;
- GP Depression Awareness Training;
- Enhanced crisis intervention services;
- An all-island public information campaign.

The Department is currently reviewing the Action Plan, to inform ongoing evaluation of the Strategy.

Free Personal Care

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the timescale for the introduction of free personal care for the elderly. (AQO 3269/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As the Honourable Member will recall, I informed the house during my speech in May, that I had commissioned a report on the cost of free personal care and a number of possible alternatives. I am currently considering that analysis. Within the context of my Department's budget settlement, I am working hard to ensure the best possible deal for all the people of Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to provide greater clarification regarding free personal care over the coming weeks.

Fire Service Appliances

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place to ensure that fire service appliances are maintained to a high standard. (AQO 3234/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A servicing programme is in place to ensure that all fire appliances receive routine servicing every year in line with Chief Fire Officers' Association guidelines and manufacturers' recommendations. That is in addition to any servicing that is needed where defects are reported.

A response system is in place which immediately records reported defects through the Regional Control Centre and is prioritised by the Duty Transport Officer. That officer is available 24/7 and all safety critical defects are responded to immediately by the Duty Mechanic, who is also on a 24/7 call out rota basis.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to review the remit, functions, powers and effectiveness of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. (AQO 3297/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have no plans at present to review the remit, functions, powers and effectiveness of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).

The RQIA is continuing to develop its functions to coincide with the introduction of additional regulatory powers and has increased the range of reviews undertaken into the provision of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

The Management Statement and Financial Memorandum between my Department and the RQIA is subject to formal review every four years or at such other intervals as the Department may determine. A copy of this document, which sets out the broad framework within which the RQIA operates, is held in the Assembly Library.

Dental Students

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the availability of training placements for final year dental students. (AQO 3275/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

FIGURES AVAILABLE ARE FOR THE ACADEMIC YEARS 2002-03 TO 2006-07.

Academic Year	No of Graduates	No of training places accepted
2002-03	29	18 QUB out of 24 recruited
2003-04	35	21 QUB out of 25 recruited
2004-05	40	21 QUB out of 25 recruited
2005-06	39	21 QUB out of 28 recruited
2006-07	38	22 QUB out of 28 recruited

Source: QUB

My Department provided additional funding over the last two years to increase the number of training places from 35 to 40 in order to match the number of QUB graduates.

Graduates have the option of either entering the Vocational Training Scheme competition in Northern Ireland, or entering the equivalent competition in Great Britain. Figures in the table illustrate the numbers of QUB graduates who take up available places in Northern Ireland, the remaining places are filled by GB graduates, many of whom are returning NI citizens who have qualified at Higher Education Institutions in the GB.

My Department also provided extra funding of £500,000 in September 2007 to increase the training capacity in the Vocational Training Scheme and work is underway to recruit further trainers.

Speech and Language Therapists

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what meetings he has had, or plans to have, with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to ensure that no financial paybacks are sought from speech and language therapists under the Agenda for Change process. (AQO 3295/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not met with the Minister for Finance and Personnel to discuss this specific issue and have no plans to do so. There have been a number of discussions at official level between both Departments on this subject. In the first instance these discussions occurred prior to commencing the Agenda for Change implementation process and more recently when the particular case of Speech and Language Therapists was raised. On these occasions officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel confirmed with my officials that there could be no justification for relaxing the Government Accounting NI principles

and that every effort must be made by HSC employers to recover the excess payments from public funds.

Agenda for Change Process

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the Agenda for Change process. (AQO 3277/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Agenda for Change implementation process is being carried out in partnership between Health and Social Care employers and staff representatives. I have set a deadline of 30 June 2008 for HSC employers to have all relevant staff on the Agenda for Change rates of pay and I expect them to meet this deadline. Employers are at various stages of the implementation process. I am pleased to report that over 90% of all staff are now in receipt of Agenda for Change rates of pay and almost 62% of these have also received the arrears due to them from 1 October 2004.

Residential Care

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to address the issue of older people having to sell their homes to cover the cost of residential care. (AQO 3316/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise that many people feel that the current charging regime for residential and nursing home care is unfair. That is why I commissioned an update of the cost of introducing free personal care together with a number of alternative amendments to the current charging regime, including the introduction of a complete disregard of the resident's former home. I am currently considering this analysis and I hope to be able to provide greater clarification regarding these measures over the coming weeks.

Smoke Free

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his assessment of the impact on public health following the first year of Northern Ireland going smoke free. (AQO 3289/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A comprehensive research project to enable my Department to gauge the impact of smoke-free legislation will be available later in the year.

Although the legislation is designed to protect the public and employees, it has also encouraged smokers to try to stop. Provisional figures show that 19,662 people attending cessation services set a quit date in 2007/08. The figures for 2006/07 and 2005/06 were 13,795 and 8,702 respectively.

Support for the legislation remains high with 97.6% of over 31,000 premises inspected up to December 2007 compliant with the no smoking requirement and 94.5% displaying correct signage.

In the longer term, I anticipate that major health benefits will accrue from smoke-free legislation and these should be reflected in data on tobacco-related mortality and morbidity.

Smoking Cessation Programmes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funds that have been made available for smoking cessation programmes; and to confirm how these allocations are determined. (AQO 3314/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The funding made available to Health and Social Services Boards by the Department for smoking cessation services over the past three financial years is set out in the table below:-

Year	Allocation
2005/06	£ 760,000
2006/07	£1,060,000
2007/08	£1,210,000
Total	£3,030,000

The allocations include a recurrent £760k in Boards' baselines, uplifted each year to reflect inflation. The resources were allocated using the capitation formula, which aims to ensure that each Board receives an equitable share of available resources by taking account of a number of factors, including age and gender profiles.

In addition, my Department allocated £480,000 in 2006/07 and £600,000 in 2007/08 to support community pharmacy smoking cessation services across Northern Ireland.

Lisanelly Site

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential of the Lisanelly site to provide integrated health, education and social services. (AQO 3274/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: The Lisanelly site was considered for the proposed Enhanced Local Hospital Complex at Omagh under a site selection exercise carried out in 2006. Following a robust appraisal of all the potential sites in the area, the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital site was selected as the preferred option for the new hospital. There are no proposals at this time for health, social services or public safety facilities on the Lisanelly site.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bus Service

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the provision of the bus service from (i) Carrickfergus and (ii) Larne, to Antrim Area Hospital. (AQW 5948/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): I have been informed that Translink currently operates a weekday service to Antrim Area Hospital from Carrickfergus Rail Station and Larne Bus Station.

It is likely that support from my Department's Rural Transport Fund will enable an improved service, in line with passenger demand, from Carrickfergus to Antrim Area Hospital from 30 June 2008.

In relation to services from Larne, I understand that, from 28 April, Translink will operate weekday services from Larne to Antrim station and that a half-hourly service will connect the station to the hospital. These modifications were made in order to provide a more regular spread of services throughout the day and better reflect patronage levels.

Disused Culverts

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of abandoned or disused culverts in Newtownards. (AQW 6293/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am advised by my Department's Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water that they are not aware of any abandoned or disused culverts in Newtownards.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency has also advised me that there are no designated culverted watercourses in Newtownards that have been abandoned or are disused.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of staff in his department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6304/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: There is no formal home working policy within the NI Civil Service generally or the Department for Regional Development specifically. However, in practice there can be short-term and/or local arrangements in particular circumstances. The Department does not retain central records of such arrangements.

In the interests of promoting Work Life Balance, the Department also operates a Teleworking Scheme under which, subject to business needs, staff may apply to work for a limited number of days per week at one of the Department's four dedicated Teleworking Centres (Newry, Omagh, Seaford and Derry).

Departmental Land

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the land and acreage belonging to the department, and the plans for this land. (AQW 6310/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Table below shows details currently held by my Department.

Number of Plots	Area (Hectares)	Category
369	43.168 (approx)	Disposal ¹
745	275.593 (approx)	Interim Estate ²

¹ Disposal in this context means surplus land in the ownership of Roads Service which is no longer required for the purpose for which it was acquired and is currently in the process of being disposed of.

² Interim Estate in this context refers to land which has been acquired for future schemes.

Parking Tickets

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of parking tickets issued to Republic of Ireland registered vehicles since the inception of the National Car Parks contract; and (ii) what percentage of the total number of tickets issued this represents. (AQW 6329/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The parking enforcement contract with NCP Services Ltd commenced at the end of October 2006. For the period since then, to the end of March 2008, the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued to southern registered vehicles is 16,950. This figure represents some 7.7% of the total number of PCNs issued.

Parking Tickets

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) monetary value, of parking tickets issued to Republic of Ireland registered vehicles since the inception of the National Car Parks contract for which payment is outstanding. (AQW 6331/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Of the 16,950 PCNs issued to southern registered vehicles, 12,324 (72.7%) have payment outstanding. The current monetary value of these is £739,620.

Currently, my Department cannot pursue vehicle owners from the South who are issued with a parking ticket in the North due to legal issues surrounding the exchange of vehicle keeper details.

My officials are actively working to try and resolve these issues.

Cycle Paths

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location and timescale for the construction of new cycle paths in the Strangford parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6332/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has a number of cycling projects planned or underway within the Strangford parliamentary constituency during 2008/09.

Work is expected to be completed on the final section of the Comber Greenway project between Ballyrainey Road, Comber and Grahamsbridge Road, Dundonald. On completion, this will provide a combined cycle and footway from Comber to Belfast, largely along the route of the former railway line.

In Comber, it is proposed to provide an extension of the existing path on Newtownards Road to the garage opposite the health centre.

It is also planned to provide signing and additional paths, where possible, on a circular cycle route incorporating Newtownards - Portaferry, - Downpatrick, - Killyleagh and Comber.

Finally, in conjunction with the Rural Schools project funded by DARD and Roads Service, it is planned to provide a combined path at St Mary's Stile in Killyleagh which will link St Mary's Primary School and Killyleagh Primary School.

Road Schemes

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the general road schemes;

and (ii) road calming measures, he has planned for the East Antrim parliamentary constituency over the next three years. (AQW 6335/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service develops its programmes on an annual basis, as much of the work is either reactive in nature or based on up-to-date collision histories. Roads Service does not collate its general road schemes or road calming measures on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, Roads Service officials have identified the locations of planned schemes for 2008/09 that they consider to be within the East Antrim parliamentary constituency:

2008/09 General/Minor Road Schemes

- Installation of new pelican crossing at Old Glenarm Road, Larne;
- Rephasing of traffic signals and minor footway improvements at Victoria Road/Agnew Street junction in Larne;
- Provision of bus lay-by at Old Glenarm Road, Larne;
- Minor footway improvements in the Larne Borough;
- New signage/lines and small scale works in the Larne Borough;
- Measures to improve sight lines for traffic exiting Lunnun Road onto Brown's Bay; Islandmagee;
- A vehicle containment system at Beach Road, Whitehead to reduce the risk of vehicles encroaching on the adjacent railway track
- Completion of a parallel incursion barrier along Shore Road, Magheramourne, parallel to the railway line;
- Provision of a visibility splay to the northern side of the junction of Bridgend Road/Forthill Road, Ballycarry;
- Provision of a visibility splay on the northern side of the junction of Gobbins Road/Mullaghboy Road, Islandmagee and improvements to the stopping sight distance at the adjacent bend; and
- Provision of visibility splays at the junction of Ballyhampton Road/Old Ballyhampton Road, Larne.

2008/09 Road Calming Measures

- Seacliff Estate, Larne - area wide traffic calming scheme;
- Station Road, Greenisland;
- the Alexander Road area, the Barn Road/Elizabeth Avenue area, Carrickfergus ; and
- Prospect Heights and Regent Avenue in Carrickfergus.

I can also advise that Roads Service has received requests for the provision of traffic calming measures which would currently be considered for inclusion in the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 programme of works. These include:

- Windmill Avenue, Carrickfergus; and
- Rosstulla Park and Glenbroome Park, Newtownabbey.

However, as further assessments are completed these priorities may change and there is no guarantee that these streets will feature in future programmes.

All Roads Service schemes are subject to the availability of finance. In addition, the road calming schemes are subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes.

Works programmes for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years have not been finalised at this stage, however a number of minor works schemes are under consideration for inclusion and will be brought forward through the appropriate approvals process.

With regard to major road works, I can advise that Roads Service is currently developing a proposal for the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland between Shore Avenue (University) and Seapark. Draft Statutory Orders have been published and a public inquiry held into the proposals. Roads Service intends to make an announcement in the autumn of 2008 on the way forward for the scheme. The Department's Investment Delivery Plan for Roads indicates that the anticipated advertisement to market this scheme would be in 2010/11, subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the level of funding available at the time.

People with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to improve the priority seating signage on buses, for people with disabilities. (AQW 6338/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that it is currently revising all interior priority seating signage in consultation with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee and the Consumer Council. I understand that current signage is fully compliant with Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations.

Ticketing System

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to improve the ticketing system for buses and trains to assist people with visual impairments. (AQW 6339/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has informed me that they are currently scoping the requirements of a replacement ticketing system. The needs of people with visual impairments will be fully considered as part of this exercise.

Thompson Solutions

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the assistance provided by Roads Service staff to Thompson Solutions, who have lodged a planning application for a new factory at Moor Road, Kilkeel. (AQW 6349/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provided assistance to Thompson Solutions through participation of officials at discussions about planning application P/08/0434/F, which relates to a new factory at Moor Road, Kilkeel.

At the recent meeting held on Tuesday 22 April 2008, also attended by representatives of Planning Service, the requirements for improvements to local infrastructure, which would be needed in association with any development, were explained to the applicant.

Such improvements would involve widening of Moor Road from its junction with Newcastle Road to the site access and provision of footways. It was also pointed out that the Key Design Requirements for industrial development in this zone, as stipulated in the Draft Banbridge Newry & Mourne Area Plan, makes reference to a proposed development led link road between Moor Road and Harbour Road.

The applicant has also been advised that a Transport Assessment would need to be submitted as part of the planning process.

Disabled Parking

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of car parking spaces owned by the Roads Service that are currently allocated as disabled parking, broken down by council area. (AQW 6360/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that they presently provide 1789 on-street disabled car parking places, however, a breakdown by council area is not maintained. They also provide 740 disabled car parking spaces in off-street car parks either owned or leased by them and a breakdown by council area is provided in the table below.

Council	Disabled Parking Places In Off-Street Car Parks
Derry City Council	20
Coleraine Borough Council	45
Limavady Borough Council	14
Moyle District Council	04
Ballymena Borough Council	60

Council	Disabled Parking Places In Off-Street Car Parks
Antrim Borough Council	26
Larne Borough Council	22
Ballymoney Borough Council	14
Fermanagh District Council	25
Cookstown District Council	07
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	16
Omagh District Council	40
Magherafelt District Council	28
Strabane District Council	18
Ards Borough Council	43
Down District Council	33
Newry and Mourne District Council	40
Armagh District Council	26
Banbridge District Council	38
Craigavon Borough Council	105
Belfast City Council	25
Lisburn City Council	23
Newtownabbey Borough Council	18
Carrickfergus Borough Council	25
North Down Borough Council	25
Castlereagh Borough Council	0
Total	740

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps are being taken by Northern Ireland Water and his Department to address the wear and tear of gabions adjacent to Smugglers Tavern Restaurant, Killyleagh. (AQW 6364/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the gabions adjacent to the Smugglers Table Restaurant, Killyleagh, were installed by a Water Service contractor during work to lay a sewage pumping main in 2001. To facilitate a bridge crossing, the ground on both banks of the river was excavated and, following construction works, the gabions were installed to protect and stabilise the river bank.

NIW will arrange an inspection of the gabions to assess their condition and investigate where responsibility lies for undertaking maintenance. I have asked the

Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water to write to you when the outcome of the investigation is known.

Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all the streets, areas, villages and estates which the Roads Service has assessed, scored and prioritised within the Ards Borough Council area, and to indicate the score and prioritisation given to each. (AQW 6387/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of traffic calming schemes for the Ards Borough Council assessed by my Department's Roads Service are provided in the table below.

ASSESSMENTS FOR TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES IN ARDS BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
1	West Street, Newtownards	140
2	East Street, Newtownards	105
3	Whiteways/Mountain Rd, Newtownards	100
4	Victoria Avenue, Newtownards	90
5	Old Shore Road, Newtownards	85
6	Rubane Road	85
7	Beverley / Rosevale	80
8	Beverley Avenue, Newtownards	80
9	Bridge Street Link	80
10	Corry Street, Newtownards	80
11	Belfast Road, Comber	75
12	Oakdale, Ballygowan	75
13	Shore Road Kircubbin, Bad Bend, Kircubbin	75
14	Main Road, Cloughy	65
15	East Mount, Newtownards	60
16	Londonderry Road, Comber	60
17	New Harbour Road, Portavogie	60
18	Springfield Road, Portavogie	60
19	Londonderry Road, Newtownards	55
20	Stratheden Hights, Newtownards	55
21	The Brae, Ballygowan (Estimate)	55
22	Westland Road, Ballywalter	55
23	Beechfield Drive, Donaghadee	50
24	Church Way/Avenue, Kircubbin	50

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
25	De Wind Drive, Comber	50
26	Glenariff Drive/Londonderry Park, Comber	50
27	Lawson Park Portavogie	50
28	Saratoga Avenue + Glenford Road, Newtownards	50
29	Bow Street, Donaghadee	45
30	Lougheries (Ballyhaft Road)	45
31	Main Road, Portavogie A22	45
32	Main Street Portavogie A8	45
33	Queen Street, Newtownards	45
34	Stump Road, Ballywalter	45
35	Ashmount Drive, Portaferry	40
36	Cronstown and Lawnbrook Areas	40
37	Belfour Street, Newtownards	35
38	Dalton Park, Comber	35
39	Dermott Avenue/Park, Comber	35
40	Graffen Gardens/Coronation Street	35
41	Greenwell Street, Newtownards	35
42	Movilla Street, Newtownards	35
43	Old Forge Avenue, Newtownards	35
44	Shore Road, Millisle	35
45	St Columbas Drive/Pine Croft Avenue, Newtownards	35
46	Cherry Valley, Comber	30
47	Dunleath Drive, Ballywalter	30
48	Graffan Gardens, Newtownards	30
49	Orchard Avenue, Newtownards (Not Adopted), Newtownards	30
50	Well Road Ballywalter	30
51	Ballymacruse Drive Millisle	25
52	Bangor Road/Orchard Lane, Newtownards	25
53	Cairndore Road Newtownards	25
54	Johnston Park, Carrowdore	25
55	Laburum Drive, Comber	25
56	Mandaville Avenue	25
57	Ballyharry Park, Newtownards	20
58	Beverley Walk, Newtownards	20
59	Calhame Gardens, Cloghey	20
60	Cedar Park, Portaferry	15

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
61	Church Road, Carrowdore	15
62	Cuan View, Portaferry,	15
63	Dickson Park, Ballygowan	15
64	Gregstown Park, Newtownards	15
65	Hazelwood Drive, Newtownards	15
66	Rectory Park, Kircubbin	15
67	Regency Park, Newtownards	15
68	Straiddorn Green, Comber	15
69	Teal Rocks Portaferry Road, Newtownards	15
70	Thornleigh, Ballydrain	15
71	William St Court, Newtownards	15
72	Landsdown Road Newtownards	10
73	Priory Road, Newtownards	10
74	Moatlands Development Ballyhalbert	5
75	School House Brae, Donaghadee	5

Belfast Marathon

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reasons why in the interests of safety roads cannot be closed during the Belfast Marathon. (AQW 6406/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that the issue of safety and the temporary traffic management arrangements in connection with the Belfast Marathon are matters for the event organisers to arrange.

I understand that the event organisers liaise closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to ensure that the safety of those competing and watching the event is not compromised and that all the necessary traffic management measures are in place.

Water Supply

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for the last 12 months, the number of breaks in the water supply in (i) the Ards Borough Council; and (ii) the Strangford constituency. (AQW 6416/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that during the 12 months to March 2008, there were 184 interruptions to the water supply within the Ards Borough Council Area. Of these 92 interruptions were

planned and 92 unplanned. For the same period in the Strangford Constituency there were 241 interruptions to the water supply, of which 109 were planned and 132 were unplanned.

Meeting Times

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average time between a response to attend a site meeting being sent, and the meeting taking place with (i) Councillors; (ii) MLAs; and (iii) MPs. (AQW 6419/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Between 8 May 2007 and 1 May 2008 the average time between a response to attend a site meeting being issued, a mutually convenient date being agreed and the meeting taking place with (i) Councillors was 49 working days; and (ii) MLAs, 24 working days. (iii) I have not attended any site meetings with MPs.

North Down Borough Council Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all the streets, villages and estates which the Roads Service has assessed, scored and prioritised within the North Down Borough Council area, and to indicate the score and prioritisation given to each. (AQW 6425/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The locations and the current priority ranking for all applications assessed by my Department's Roads Service within the North Down Borough Council area, but not yet in a programme of works, are provided in the table below. As further assessments are completed these priorities will change.

The locations in the North Down Council area where schemes are proposed in the works programme for 2008/2009 (subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes) are, Drumhirk Drive, Skipperstone Road/Whitehill estate area, Gray's Hill area, Ballymacconnell Road South and Castle Park Road, all in Bangor.

ASSESSMENTS FOR TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES IN ROADS SERVICE EASTERN DIVISION

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Council Area
1	Croft Road	North Down
8	Willowbrook Park / Road	North Down
16	Church Road, Holywood	North Down
17	Sunningdale Park, Bangor	North Down

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Council Area
20	Abbey Ring	North Down
28	Shandon Drive	North Down
40	Innisfayle Drive	North Down
41	Thornleigh Gardens	North Down
43	Chippendale Avenue	North Down
49	Ballyree Drive	North Down
59	Ballyree	North Down
65	Princess Gardens	North Down
83	Wandsworth Road	North Down
91	Farnham Road	North Down
103	Marquis Avenue	North Down
105	Victoria Road	North Down
133	Towerview crescent	North Down
154	Sherwood Parks	North Down
166	Tower Road Conlig	North Down
167	Coronation Avenue	North Down

Water Preservation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the financial incentives he intends to provide to encourage water preservation amongst domestic users. (AQW 6468/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services commissioned by the Executive considered the provision of incentives to encourage water preservation amongst domestic users.

The Executive is currently considering the recommendations of the Independent Water Review Panel's second report including recommendations on measures to encourage preservation of water. The Executive will consult on its proposals in due course.

Bus Station

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on his plans to build a bus station in Banbridge. (AQW 6478/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from the Department continue to liaise with Tranlink in taking forward the project to construct a new bus station in Banbridge. However progress has been delayed because of land issues relating to

the proposed site for the new station. When these are resolved, Translink will submit an Economic Appraisal for approval by my Department and, if approval is granted, work to construct the station will commence as soon as possible after that.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of (i) inspectors; (ii) managers; (iii) drivers; and (iv) conductors, broken down by station, that are employed by Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 6486/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The NIR staff detail requested is set out in the following table:

	Managers	Inspectors	Drivers	Conductors	Total
Central Station	4			61	65
Bangor		2	7	10	19
Coleraine		3	10	9	22
Larne Harbour			10	10	20
Londonderry City			10	10	20
Portadown	1	4	15	15	35
Adelaide			5		5
Ballymena	1				1
Carrickfergus		1			1
Great Victoria Street	1	4			5
Lisburn		2			2
York Road	1		68		69
Total	8	16	125	115	264

Water Rates

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development if a limited company that is also a registered charity is liable to pay water rates. (AQW 6487/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that all non-domestic customers in receipt of water or sewerage services, including registered charities, will be liable to pay a charge. From 1 April 2008, there are separate charges for both water and sewerage services and non-domestic customers will be billed on either a measured or unmeasured basis.

Parking Schemes

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6098/08, if he has an estimated cost of the proposed residents' parking schemes in Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets (West) area. (AQW 6509/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that the direct site implementation for the proposed residents' parking schemes in Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets (West) area is estimated to cost £145,000. This includes the painting of lines, signage and installation of ticket machines. However, this figure does not include costs associated with the scheme design, public consultation, processing of legislation or subsequent ongoing enforcement and maintenance activities, which can not be accurately estimated at this time.

Road Side Memorials

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5601/08, to outline the equality obligation placed upon the Roads Service by equality legislation in dealing with (i) complaints about; and (ii) community approval for, troubles-related, illegally erected memorials. (AQW 6543/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has a statutory duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to good relations in carrying out its functions. This duty is fulfilled in accordance with the Department's Equality Scheme which has been approved by the Equality Commission.

Section 10 of the Equality Scheme sets out how complaints can be made and how they will be handled by the Department. With regard to community approval for troubles-related, illegally erected memorials, my Department's Roads Service pays high regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial groups. In doing so Roads Service is acutely aware that taking action to remove illegally erected monuments without the support of the wider local community could have a negative impact on relations between such groups. Roads Service's experience in dealing with similarly contentious issues such as flag flying, kerb painting, etc, has shown that community agreement is key to successfully resolving such sensitive issues.

Walking to School

Mr McFarland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the actions his Department has taken to increase the number of children who walk to school; and (ii) the increase in the number of children who walk to school since he took up office. (AQO 3278/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has promoted walking to school, through the Safer Routes to Schools initiative, since 2004. This initiative aims to tackle school travel issues by promoting sustainable modes of travel, including walking. On average 30 schools are included in the initiative each year.

Participating schools receive awareness training on the benefits of sustainable travel using classroom based resources. The scheme also includes the installation of appropriate physical infrastructure improvements within the school grounds and on public roads to make it easier and safer to walk, cycle and use public transport or car share for the school run.

Since 2004, the Safer Routes to Schools message has been promoted to 128 schools involving approximately 40,000 pupils and their parents.

This year's Walk to School Week event from 19 to 23 May, which I intend to launch, aims to further raise awareness of the impact of the school run and encourage pupils, parents and teachers from all schools across the North to leave the car at home and walk to school during the week. Details of the event have been circulated to all schools.

In terms of the uptake of children walking to school, this is a purely voluntary action and dependent on the schools' participation and parental concerns over road safety and stranger danger.

Shortly after taking up office, I was involved in the launch of Walk to School Week 2007. Nearly 25,000 pupils took part in that event and my Department plans to build on that figure this year.

As regards the Safer Routes to Schools initiative, I do not have specific figures indicating the increase in the number of children walking to school for the academic year 2007/08. However, the latest evaluation, based on the academic year 2006/07, indicates that of the schools that participated in the surveys, 50% have observed more children walking to and from school.

As this is an attitudinal survey, no actual modal shift figures were provided. I can, however, add that my Department is revising its approach to surveys with the expansion of the Safer Routes to Schools programme, and that in the future, these surveys will include a more detailed assessment of children's mode of travel.

Millennium Way Phase 2

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current status of the proposed Millennium Way Phase 2 road development in Lurgan. (AQO 3296/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has developed proposals and obtained Planning Approval for the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road link in Lurgan, an extension of Millenium Way. Presently plans detailing the land necessary to construct the scheme are being prepared.

However, Roads Service's priority for road improvements is focused on the Strategic Road Network. While the benefits of this scheme, in providing traffic relief on the road network in the west side of Lurgan during times of peak flow, are recognised, this link road does not form part of the Strategic Road Network.

Nevertheless, in the recently published Investment Delivery Plan for Roads over the next 10 years we have identified funds totalling £109 million specifically "... to complete the Non Strategic Major Improvements incorporating the schemes identified in the Sub-Regional Transport Plan". There are many competing demands for these substantial, but limited, resources and priorities have still to be determined.

However, I would confirm that the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road extension of the Millenium Way will be included among the schemes considered for inclusion in this particular programme of work.

A3 Road from Portadown

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on his plans to upgrade the A3 road from Portadown to Armagh. (AQO 3223/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service published a consultation document listing proposals to expand the Strategic Road Improvement Programme in July 2006. The schemes included were selected based on the five key criteria set for considering transportation projects, namely environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. The proposed schemes included the construction of a dual carriageway on the most heavily trafficked section of the A3, from Portadown to Richhill.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland has enabled me to build on the Strategic Road Improvement Programme identified in the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan and take into account feedback from the consultation, which

was supportive of those schemes being proposed by Roads Service.

I am pleased to confirm that my Department's Investment Delivery Plan for Roads, published on the Department's website at the start of April 2008, includes a proposal to dual the A3 between Portadown and Richhill. Roads Service will be appointing consultants in due course to commence the work of assessing route options for this major road scheme.

Disabled Parking

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the length of time required to process an application for a disabled parking bay. (AQO 3264/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The time taken to process an application for a disabled parking bay is dependent on the circumstances surrounding the individual application.

When an application is received, the availability of parking in the subject area is assessed by visiting the site at different times of the day. It normally takes about three weeks to complete an assessment.

Following the completion of the assessment, approval is required from the PSNI before the legislative process, including local consultation, to authorise disabled parking facilities can begin. Subject to there being no objections, this process usually takes about six months to complete.

Sewerage Works

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the consultation that has taken place between him and the Minister for the Environment in relation to developing an integrated strategy to upgrade sewerage works in line with increasing development in specific areas in Northern Ireland. (AQO 3290/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have had no specific consultation with the Minister for the Environment on this matter but Northern Ireland Water has worked closely with the Department of the Environment in developing a programme of investment which takes account of development, capacity of works and environmental compliance.

Emerald Fund

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the transport infrastructure proposals he has prepared for consideration by the Emerald Fund. (AQO 3227/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not prepared any such proposals. Details of how the Emerald Fund is to operate have not yet been made available to my Department.

Executive Office in Brussels

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Regional Development when he last used the Executive Office in Brussels. (AQO 3266/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not used the Executive office in Brussels since taking up my Ministerial portfolio in May 2007.

Water Pressure

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the action taken by Northern Ireland Water to address the ongoing situation of poor water pressure in the Clonoe area of the Mid-Ulster parliamentary constituency. (AQO 3324/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a recent zonal study examined the adequacy of the water distribution system serving the Clonoe area. The Study identified the need to upgrade and replace a number of existing water mains, which will be prioritised by NIW and included in its capital works programme. However, due to competing priorities, it is unlikely that any improvements could commence before 2009/10.

A two kilometre section of water main on the Washing Bay Road has been identified as the likely cause of low water pressure in the Clonoe area. In order to resolve the pressure problems for residents as soon as possible, NIW is investigating the technical feasibility of replacing this section of water main in advance of the work required under the zonal study. This would, of course, be subject to the availability of funding. If approved, the work could commence around August this year.

Residents' Parking Schemes

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the consultation on residents' parking schemes in Belfast. (AQO 3268/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Members will be aware that, on 17 April 2008, I launched the informal consultation process to locally elected representatives on the first five proposed residents' parking schemes in Belfast.

My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that consultation documents were sent to all residential and business properties in the Barrack Street, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass, Brown's Square and Markets (West) areas, on 18 April 2008. Feedback received will inform the way forward.

Rural Transport Fund

Mr Burnside asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the operational success of the Rural Transport Fund. (AQO 3229/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I consider the Rural Transport Fund to have been a great success. Since its inception in 1998 the Fund has been delivering lifeline services to rural dwellers with reduced mobility. It currently supports 18 Rural Community Transport Partnerships and also provides funding to Translink to operate some 23 rural bus routes that would otherwise be uneconomic.

Following a review of the Fund, I have recently announced changes that I believe will further enhance the type and level of services provided.

Street Lighting

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans for extending street lighting in rural areas. (AQO 3259/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service use two main criteria when considering the provision of street lighting in rural areas. These are:

- the density of housing within a community, including public buildings with significant night time use, and
- road safety, where street lighting would contribute to a reduction of night-time accidents.

The policy for provision of road lighting in rural locations was relaxed in 2002, so that any public building with significant evening use within a community, would be counted as two dwellings, when applying the housing density criteria.

Roads Service also has to balance the demand for more rural lighting against the unwelcome effects of increased urbanisation of the countryside, the environmental impact of night sky light pollution on people, wildlife and flora and the financial costs of providing and maintaining additional public lighting installations.

There are no plans for a further review of the criteria at this time.

Ballymoney Railway Station

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans for the refurbishment of Ballymoney Railway station. (AQO 3262/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Work to upgrade Ballymoney Station in accordance with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Translink's New Rail Vision started recently and should be completed by the end of August. The work includes the installation of tactile paving, lighting, platform surfacing, signage, refurbishing toilets and general repainting at a cost of £345,000. Translink also have plans for the renewal of the station roof which should be undertaken in the course of the next year at a cost of £370,000.

Also planned is a "Sustrans" project to be undertaken in partnership with Ballymoney Council to construct a new footbridge over the station, linking the recreational area and new housing to the south of the station with the main town centre. The scheme is match funded by Translink and the Council, with both sides contributing approximately £350,000 each. Timescales for this project are being finalised but it should be complete within the next 2 to 4 years.

Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider widening the application of the fuel duty rebate scheme, in light of the recent rise in the cost of fuel. (AQO 3228/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Rebate on the duty paid on fuel is intended as a support for road operators to help them provide affordable public transport services. The Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme is only open to operators who possess a valid Road Service Licence to run stage carriage public transport services. There are currently no plans to widen the application of the scheme to include non stage carriage services.

Northern Ireland's Railway Service

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the strategies he has put in place to improve Northern Ireland's railway service between Belfast and Dublin, in light of Northern Ireland Railway's recent analysis of the service's failings. (AQO 3286/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Belfast-Dublin Enterprise trains are jointly operated by NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann. They operate 106 services per week carrying almost 900,000 passengers annually. The reliability of the service over the year April 2007-March 2008 was 99.72% meaning that only

0.28% of services were cancelled. The punctuality of the service, that is trains arriving on time or late by less than 10 minutes, was 88.2 %. This compares favourably with most intercity services operated throughout Britain and Ireland.

NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann continuously monitor all causes of delay or service failure which have been caused by a variety of factors including problems with the locomotives, track or signalling failures and implement rectification, modification and upgrade programmes to address these issues.

Discussions have taken place between NIR and Iarnród Éireann over a number of years in respect of potential upgrades to the Belfast-Dublin rail service. In February 2006 NIR and Iarnród Éireann agreed a forward development strategy for the Enterprise service, recognising the long-term aspiration to improve journey times and service frequencies. The North-South Ministerial Council in December 2007 asked officials to assess the options and prepare a Business Case for consideration.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Fuel Allowance

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development if she intends to increase the fuel allowance for persons aged 60-79 to correspond with the fuel allowance for those aged 80 years and over. (AQW 6166/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): The Winter Fuel Payment Scheme was introduced in January 1998 as part of the strategy to alleviate fuel poverty by providing specific help to those aged 60 and over with their winter fuel bills.

An additional £100 has been paid to those aged 80 or over since the winter of 2003/2004. This additional money is targeted at those aged over 80 as they are more likely than younger pensioners to have a lower income, to spend a greater proportion of household spending on fuel, to be in fuel poverty and to be living in poorer conditions.

In keeping with the long-standing principle of parity on social security matters, the level of Winter Fuel Payment is the same here as that set in Britain by the Westminster Parliament.

Modernisation Fund

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the progress made in accessing application

to the modernisation fund; and to provide a breakdown, by district council area, of (i) the names of groups who have applied to the modernisation fund; (ii) the names of groups who have been successful; and (iii) the amount of funding awarded to each group. (AQW 6180/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since the programme closed to application on 19 October 2007 significant progress has been made in the assessment of the 475 applications received across the 3 schemes within the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme. These applications have a cumulative total value of some £195 million while there is £15 million available through the Programme.

Following a competitive tendering process an independent Intermediary Body was appointed to take forward the assessment process. The current status of each scheme within the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme is as follows:

- **Scheme 1. Infrastructure Pilot Scheme – [£9m grant available]** 145 applications received – the assessment by the Intermediary Body is still underway. Projects to be notified of assessment decision within 3 weeks.
- **Scheme 2. Community Facility Improvement Scheme – [£3m grant available]** 135 applications received – assessment completed & decision made to take up to 18 applications through to economic appraisal stage. All applicants within this scheme are aware of the assessment outcome of their application.
- **Scheme 3. Small Capital Grant Scheme – [£3m grant available]** 186 applications received – assessment completed and decision made to take up to 55 projects through to economic appraisal. All applicants within this scheme are aware of the assessment outcome of their application.

Details of applications by district council area are not held and could only be produced at disproportionate cost. The address of each applicant by Northern Ireland county has been included in the application lists placed in the library.

- (i) Four hundred and seventy five applications have been received across the three schemes within the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme and a listing of applications received within each scheme has been placed in the library.
- (ii) As decisions have not yet been arrived at this information is not available at this time but will be posted on my Departments web site once available.
- (iii) Again this information is not available at this time and will be posted on the Departmental website when available.

Youth Workers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of youth workers funded by her department, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6183/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the information requested.

TABLE - THE NUMBER OF YOUTH WORKERS FUNDED BY DSD AS AT 28 APRIL 2008

Constituency	Number of youth workers funded
East Londonderry	5
Newry and Armagh	2
Belfast East	5
Belfast North	26
Belfast South	5
Belfast West	9
North Antrim	5
East Antrim	1
Upper Bann	1
Foyle	9
Total	68

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) when the last review of the Disability Living Allowance criteria was carried out; and (ii) her plans to review the criteria in the future. (AQW 6230/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since the introduction of Disability Living Allowance in 1992, there has not been any large scale review of this benefit. However, certain aspects have been reviewed and improved. For example, in 2001 the age limit for claiming higher rate mobility component was reduced allowing children over age 3 to receive it.

Disability Living Allowance remains under continual review to ensure that it continues to provide help with the extra costs that people with disabilities face.

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that she has flown business class in her capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by her department; and to confirm

if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) she is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6241/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since taking up office in May 2007, I have flown a total of 20 times in my capacity as Minister. Fifteen of these flights were business class, at a cost of £8,322, and 5 economy class. All of these flights were booked in accordance with Northern Ireland Civil Service guidance.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how a new application for co-ownership housing will be processed. (AQW 6244/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Responsibility for the administration of the co-ownership scheme rests with the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association who will process applications in accordance with normal practice. The Association will use £15m grant funding and external finance to assist 500 participants in accordance with the Programme for Government target for this year.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people who are currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6252/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the Table below. The figures show the number of claims where Disability Living Allowance was in payment at the date of extract. The date of extract was 23 February 2008.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE BENEFIT CLAIMANTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AT 23 FEBRUARY 2008

Parliamentary Constituency	2008
Belfast East	7,333
Belfast North	12,246
Belfast South	7,201
Belfast West	16,119
East Antrim	6,691
East Londonderry	7,093
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	8,736
Foyle	13,711
Lagan Valley	7,934
Mid Ulster	9,302
Newry And Armagh	11,397

Parliamentary Constituency	2008
North Antrim	7,970
North Down	5,697
South Antrim	8,106
South Down	10,833
Strangford	7,806
Upper Bann	11,864
West Tyrone	11,842
Unallocated Postcode *	1,210
Total	173,091

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Electoral Wards, District Council areas and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward, council or constituency using this method and some cannot be allocated at all.

Housing Executive

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the reasons why the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has withdrawn funding for the renovation scheme at Taylor's Avenue, Carrickfergus, until January 2010. (AQW 6257/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The actual start date for any scheme included within the Housing Executive's proposed programme of improvement schemes is subject to the availability of finance, acceptable tender prices and other statutory approvals, and estimated start dates are subject to change. On that basis the programme is subject to continuous review.

Preparatory work for this scheme is continuing and the scheme is currently programmed to start in the 2009/10 financial year.

Departmental Land

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the amount of vacant land owned by her department in the Lagan Valley constituency; and (ii) her plans to utilise this land for social housing. (AQW 6271/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does not own any land in the Lagan Valley area. Details of the draft social housing development programme can be accessed at the Housing Executive's website: www.nihe.gov.uk.

Social Housing

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the projection for new social

housing in the Lagan Valley constituency for the next 5 years. (AQW 6272/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table set out the draft Social Housing Development Programme for the years 2008/09 to 2012/13 for the Lagan Valley constituency.

LAGAN VALLEY SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

2008/09

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
BIH	Lagmore, Phase 7, Belfast	37	General Needs
Clanmil	Seymour Street, Lisburn	48	Elderly (CAT1)
Trinity	Nettlehill Road, Lisburn	29	Elderly (CAT1)
Trinity	21 Ashley Park, Dunmurry	8	Elderly (CAT1)

2009/10

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
BIH	Lagmore Private, Belfast	73	General Needs
South Ulster	Beechgrove, Dromore Phase 2	5	General Needs

2010/11

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
BIH	31 Church Hill, Lambeg, Dunmurry	15	Elderly (CAT1)
Fold	Dunmurry Lane, Roads Service Site, Dunmurry	14	Elderly (CAT1)
Transfer	Hillside Terrace, Lisburn	4	General Needs
Transfer	Old Warren2, Phase 4, Lisburn	20	General Needs

2011/12

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
Fold	Longstone Re-settlement, Ph2, Lisburn	5	Learning Disabilities
Fold	Prince William Road, Lisburn	24	General Needs
Supported Selection	DLT Dispersed, Phase 1, Lisburn	6	Learning Disabilities

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
Transfer	Tirowen Hostel Site, Lisburn	10	General Needs

2012/13

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
Fold	Moss Lane/Mount Street, Dromore	12	General Needs

Social Housing Accommodation

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the social housing accommodation currently available from (i) the Antrim Street District Office; and (ii) Dairy Farm District Office, Lisburn.

(AQW 6280/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The requested information at 31 March 2008 was as follows:

District Office	Northern Ireland Housing Executive Total	Housing Association Total
Antrim Street	4398	860
Dairy Farm	1887	1051

Festival Funding

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of funding she has provided to festivals over the past three years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6299/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the information requested.

DSD FUNDING TO FESTIVALS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Constituency	2005/6 £	2006/7 £	2007/8 £
Belfast West	121,548	NIL	NIL
Belfast North	208,420	126,250	198,594
Foyle	39,150	Nil	Nil

The Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure assumed responsibility for providing support for community festivals in 2006/07. Funding provided in 2006/07 and 2007/08 represents grants made under the Laganside Events Grant initiative which is aimed at

supporting events that contribute to the regeneration of the Laganside area, to encourage local involvement and community and business participation and to attract visitors to the area.

My Department is also providing funding to Orangefest for a Development Officer who has responsibility for the production of a Belfast Orangefest Strategic Plan, one of the key objectives being to promote Orangefest events as an inclusive and family friendly event. Funding of up to £104,200 will be provided over the three year period, 2006/07 - 2008/09. The Department to date has provided funding of £7,999 in 2006/07 and £35,996 in 2007/08. The impact of this funding is not delivered wholly within one Parliamentary Constituency.

Departmental Land

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the land and acreage belonging to the department, and the plans for this land. (AQW 6312/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department holds 1,420 acres of land for development purposes across Belfast, Regional towns and the North West. In addition, a further 4.4 acres in Belfast and Derry are occupied by Social Security Agency buildings.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, (i) the number of applications received by the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Association Ltd; (ii) the number of applications granted; and (iii) the amount of money invested. (AQW 6341/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of applications received, the number of applications accepted and Government funding for each of the last five years for the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association is detailed in the table below:

Year	Applications Received	Applications Accepted	Funding £m
2003/2004	798	463	7.9
2004/2005	766	502	12.6
2005/2006	768	504	7.2
2006/2007	525	325	4.2
2007/2008	1419	935	18.8

Modernisation Fund Capital Programme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the voluntary, community and sporting groups in West Tyrone parliamentary constituency (i) who have submitted an application to the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme; and (ii) whose applications have been deemed unsuccessful at the initial assessment stage. (AQW 6342/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since the programme closed to application on 19 October 2007 significant progress has been made in the assessment of the 475 applications received across the three schemes within the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme. These applications have a cumulative total value of some £195 million while there is £15 million available through the Programme.

Details of applications by parliamentary constituency are not held and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail when she was informed of the funding crisis within the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Association Ltd. (AQW 6343/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Due to unprecedented demand last year when over 900 households were helped onto the home ownership ladder, the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association has become a victim of its own success.

The Association is starting this year with £15m grant funding which is almost 4 times the amount at the start of last year and it has to be recognised that there are limits to public spending. NICHA will use the grant and external finance to deliver the Programme for Government target of 500 participants.

Housing Executive

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive allocations in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; (iii) Portadown; (iv) Central Craigavon; (v) Dollingstown; (vi) Waringstown; (vii) Magheralin; (viii) Donaghcloney; (ix) Gilford; (x) Laurencetown; and (xi) Blackscull, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6352/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The requested information is set out in the following table. Blackscull is included in the administrative boundaries of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Lurgan and Banbridge District Offices.

	Allocations (Jan-Dec 2005)	Allocations (Jan-Dec 2006)	Allocations (Jan-Dec 2007)
Banbridge	63	57	72
Lurgan	162	110	143
Portadown	225	211	157
Central Craigavon	95	101	94
Dollingstown	3	4	1
Waringstown	5	4	1
Magheralin	4	0	1
Donacloney	5	7	2
Gilford	15	18	13
Laurencetown	6	3	5

Housing Executive

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting list for housing in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; (iii) Portadown; (iv) Central Craigavon; (v) Dollingstown; (vi) Waringstown; (vii) Magheralin; (viii) Donaghcloney; (ix) Gilford; (x) Laurencetown; and (xi) Blackscull. (AQW 6353/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table sets out the position at 31 December 2007. Blackscull is included in the administrative boundaries of the Housing Executive's Lurgan and Banbridge District Offices.

Housing Executive District	Applicants (at 31 December 2007)
Banbridge	398
Lurgan	777
Portadown	764
Central Craigavon	261
Dollingstown	16
Waringstown	14
Magheralin	24
Donacloney	20
Gilford	31
Laurencetown	8

Housing Associations

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties owned by Housing Associations in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; (iii) Portadown; (iv) Central Craigavon; (v) Dollingstown; (vi) Waringstown; (vii) Magheralin; (viii) Donaghcloney; (ix) Gilford; (x) Laurencetown; and (xi) Blackscull. (AQW 6354/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The requested information as at 31 March 2008 is set out in the following table. Blackscull is included in the administrative boundaries of the Housing Executive's Lurgan and Banbridge District Offices.

Housing Executive area.	Housing Association Stock
Banbridge	204
Lurgan	383
Portadown	629
Central Craigavon	33
Dollingstown	1
Waringstown	9
Magheralin	13
Donacloney	52
Gilford	10
Laurencetown	0

Housing Executive

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; (iii) Portadown; (iv) Central Craigavon; (v) Dollingstown; (vi) Waringstown; (vii) Magheralin; (viii) Donaghcloney; (ix) Gilford; (x) Laurencetown; and (xi) Blackscull. (AQW 6355/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The requested information at 31 March 2008 is set out in the following table. Blackscull is included in the administrative boundaries of the Housing Executive's Lurgan and Banbridge District Offices.

Housing Executive area	Housing Executive Stock
Banbridge	811
Lurgan	1,383
Portadown	1,585
Central Craigavon	951

Housing Executive area	Housing Executive Stock
Dollingstown	59
Waringstown	58
Magheralin	46
Donacloney	69
Gilford	159
Laurencetown	51

District Council	Applicants at 31 March 2006	Applicants at 31 March 2007	Applicants at 31 December 2007
Magherafelt	409	495	488
Newry & Mourne	1,562	1,727	1,763
Newtownabbey	1,459	1,578	1,713
Omagh	514	640	704
Strabane	587	561	559
Total	31,908	36,182	38,332

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of applicants registered on housing waiting lists in each local authority area in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6356/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is set out in the following table. The latest information available is for 31 December 2007.

District Council	Applicants at 31 March 2006	Applicants at 31 March 2007	Applicants at 31 December 2007
Antrim	792	979	1,037
Ards	1,276	1,525	1,626
Armagh	659	828	860
Moyle	289	301	353
Ballymena	1,254	1,411	1,540
Ballymoney	392	477	519
Banbridge	508	674	680
N. Down	1,639	1,857	1,858
Belfast	8,220	9,070	9,553
Carrickfergus	916	1,007	1,032
Castlereagh	1,060	1,150	1,356
Coleraine	1,034	1,234	1,372
Cookstown	326	367	387
Derry	1,993	2,157	2,293
Down	1,027	1,166	1,214
Dungannon	667	753	825
Fermanagh	918	1,038	1,015
Larne	380	505	512
Limavady	474	522	546
Lisburn	2,109	2,391	2,578
Craigavon	1,444	1,769	1,949

Travellers' Sites

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5636/08, to detail the proposed travellers sites that have (i) proceeded; and (ii) not proceeded, after considering Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
(AQW 6357/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There have not been any of the proposed sites within the Traveller Accommodation programme which did not proceed after consideration of the Housing Executive's obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Travellers' Sites

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5607/08, to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the complaints of unacceptable behaviour associated with Travellers' sites, handled by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
(AQW 6358/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not available. The Housing Executive does not separately record complaints regarding unacceptable behaviour associated with Travellers. Any reports of unacceptable behaviour on Traveller sites are investigated at local Housing Executive District Office level in accordance with established housing management and anti-social behaviour policies and procedures.

Urban Regeneration

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the amount of money spent by her department on urban regeneration, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; and (ii) local council area.
(AQW 6359/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I refer the Honourable Member to my answer of 17 April 2008 in relation to AQW 5593/08.

Housing Executive

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive allocations in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Cullybackey; (v) Rasharkin; (vi) Portglenone; (vii) Ahoghill; (viii) Broughshane; (ix) Dunloy; (x) Dunaghy; (xi) Lislagan; (xii) Killyrammer; (xiii) Dervock; (xiv) Bushmills; (xv) Armoy; and (xvi) Mosside. (AQW 6368/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The allocations made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations off the Common waiting list in the year to 31 December 2007 were as follows:

Location	Number
Ballymoney Town	56
Ballycastle Town	24
Ballymena Town	137
Cullybackey	13
Rasharkin	4
Portglenone	5
Ahoghill	15
Broughshane	10
Dunloy	2
Dunaghy	0
Bendooragh**	0
Killyrammer	0
Dervock	7
Bushmills	10
Armoy	4
Mosside	9

** Lislagan is included within the administrative boundaries of the Bendooragh common landlord area.

Housing Associations

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties owned by Housing Associations in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Cullybackey; (v) Rasharkin; (vi) Portglenone; (vii) Ahoghill; (viii) Broughshane; (ix) Dunloy; (x) Dunaghy; (xi) Lislagan;

(xii) Killyrammer; (xiii) Dervock; (xiv) Bushmills; (xv) Armoy; and (xvi) Mosside. (AQW 6369/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The requested information as at 31 March 2008 is set out in the following table:

Location	Housing Association Stock*
Ballymoney town	240
Ballycastle town	88
Ballymena town	273
Cullybackey	74
Rasharkin	1
Portglenone	52
Ahoghill	28
Broughshane	51
Dunloy	0
Dunaghy	0
Bendooragh**	0
Killyrammer	0
Dervock	0
Bushmills	19
Armoy	6
Mosside	0

** Lislagan is included within the administrative boundaries of the Bendooragh common landlord area.

Housing Executive

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Cullybackey; (v) Rasharkin; (vi) Portglenone; (vii) Ahoghill; (viii) Broughshane; (ix) Dunloy; (x) Dunaghy; (xi) Lislagan; (xii) Killyrammer; (xiii) Dervock; (xiv) Bushmills; (xv) Armoy; and (xvi) Mosside. (AQW 6370/08)

The Minister for Social Development: : This requested information as at 31 March 2008 is as follows:

Location	Housing Executive Stock
Ballymoney town	716
Ballycastle town	299
Ballymena town	2,084
Cullybackey	205

Location	Housing Executive Stock
Rasharkin	135
Portglenone	84
Ahoghill	122
Broughshane	130
Dunloy	79
Dunaghy	16
Bendooragh**	47
Killyrammer	24
Dervock	137
Bushmills	241
Armoy	78
Mosside	68

** Lislagen is included within the administrative boundaries of the Bendooragh common landlord area.

Housing Executive

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting list for housing in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Cullybackey; (v) Rasharkin; (vi) Portglenone; (vii) Ahoghill; (viii) Broughshane; (ix) Dunloy; (x) Dunaghy; (xi) Lislagen; (xii) Killyrammer; (xiii) Dervock; (xiv) Bushmills; (xv) Armoy; and (xvi) Mosside.

(AQW 6371/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The numbers on the common waiting list for these areas as at 31 December 2007 are as follows:

Location	Housing Applicants
Ballymoney Town	304
Ballycastle Town	161
Ballymena Town	1,082
Cullybackey	105
Rasharkin	43
Portglenone	49
Ahoghill	79
Broughshane	112
Dunloy	19
Dunaghy	10
Bendooragh**	14
Killyrammer	7
Dervock	29

Location	Housing Applicants
Bushmills	38
Armoy	21
Mosside	6

** Lislagen is included within the administrative boundaries of the Bendooragh common landlord area.

Business Class Flights

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of times she has flown business class in her capacity as Minister since assuming office in May 2007; and (ii) the cost incurred by her Department for this travel, and to confirm if flying business class is standard practice or whether she is given the option of flying business class.

(AQW 6389/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since taking up office in May 2007 I have flown a total of 20 times in my capacity as Minister. Fifteen of these flights were business class, at a cost of £8,332, and 5 economy class. All of these flights were booked in accordance with Northern Ireland Civil Service guidelines.

Housing Executive

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting list for Carrickfergus in (i) Sunnylands; (ii) Castlemara; (iii) Greenisland; (iv) Whitehead; (v) Eden; (vi) Woodburn; (vii) Glenfield; (viii) Victoria; and (ix) Windmill.

(AQW 6402/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The numbers of applicants on the common waiting list for social housing for the areas requested as at 31 December 2007 are as follows:

Common Landlord Area	Applicants
Sunnylands	253
Castlemara	15
Greenisland	91
Whitehead	84
Eden	46
Lower Woodburn	145
Upper Woodburn	5
Glenfield	13
Victoria	125
Windmill Hill	123

Wood Pellet Boilers

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development to detail her plans to include wood pellet boilers as an alternative to oil and gas, as part of the Warm Homes Scheme and Warm Homes Plus. (AQW 6535/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This year, I am co-funding a £550,000 pilot project with Northern Ireland Electricity to test a number of renewable energy technologies, mostly in hard-to-treat homes in rural areas. This will help to identify whether such technologies are a viable, cost-effective alternative to oil or gas heating in the longer term.

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff in her Department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6550/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development does not have a Home-working policy. However, when business needs allow and subject to the agreement of local management, staff may have worked from home on occasions. This is purely on an ad-hoc basis and records are not held.

Regional Infrastructure Programme

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of funding that has been awarded through the Regional Infrastructure Programme since its launch. (AQW 6635/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since April 2002, just over £16m has been awarded under this programme.

Communication with Farset

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development if departmental representatives have had contact or communication with Farset, or anyone acting on behalf of Farset, in relation to the funding of projects in loyalist areas since 1 January 2008, and if so to detail the dates and nature of any communications. (AQW 6646/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Officials from my Department meet with Farset Youth and Community Development Ltd. on a regular basis to discuss projects and work in Loyalist areas. The nature of these meetings is to discuss the work for which they are being funded. These meetings have taken place on

the following dates: 9 January 2008; 31 January 2008; 6 February 2008; 20 February 2008; 5 March 2008; 27 March 2008; 2 April 2008; 8 April 2008; 14 April 2008 and 22 April 2008.

Heating Systems

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development to detail her plans to replace Economy 7 heating systems in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties. (AQW 6647/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Progress is continuing towards the installation of natural gas or oil in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties, where this is possible. The programme for the financial year 2008/09 proposes heating upgrades to 2,300 dwellings. Within this programme, 25% of dwellings currently have an Economy 7 heating system.

Green Spaces

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the measures she is taking to address the damage caused to open green spaces in Northern Ireland Housing Executive districts. (AQW 6648/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Open green spaces in Northern Ireland Housing Executive areas are maintained to pre-set standards through planned maintenance programmes. Where such areas suffer significant damage, then rehabilitation works are also carried out through these contracts.

If the damage is the result of anti-social behaviour the Housing Executive liaises with the relevant statutory authorities to address the problem.

Environmental Improvement Schemes

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a timescale within which the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Environmental Improvement Schemes will commence in (i) Glenwood; (ii) Glenbawn; (iii) Laurelbanks; (iv) Glenkeen/Ardcaoin; and (v) Woodside, Poleglass Dairyfarm Northern Ireland Housing Executive district. (AQW 6657/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Environmental Improvement Schemes are currently programmed to commence as follows:

Area	Year
Glenwood	2009/10

Area	Year
Glenbawn	2013/14
Laurelbank	2010/11
Glenkeen/Ardcaoin	2012/13
Woodside	2011/12

EU Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the EU funding surrendered by her Department in each of the last 2 financial years. (AQW 6673/08)

The Minister for Social Development: No EU funding has been surrendered by my Department in the last 2 financial years.

Bonfire Funding

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the criteria used by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive when considering bonfire funding. (AQW 6678/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's approach to dealing with bonfires aims:

- To reduce the risk to the environment.
- To develop a partnership approach which allows the agencies involved to impact on the bonfire issue in a cohesive manner.
- To develop a graduated response to bonfires which involves consultation, shared understanding, negotiation and if necessary proportionate and legal use of enforcement methods.
- To promote a shared, inclusive community celebration.

Housing Executive

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the bonfire programmes which the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are funding in 2008. (AQW 6679/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive will not be funding any bonfire programmes as such this year. However, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Best Kept Bonfire Initiative, under which bonfire sites that meet certain eligibility criteria can apply will again be available in 2008/09. One bonfire site within each of Housing Executive's local District Office areas can be awarded £500. Last year only 3 sites applied. Nothing has been paid to date in the current year.

Housing Executive

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff that have lost their jobs in the Bangor Office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, over the last 6 months. (AQW 6798/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The contracts of three temporary Clerical Officers have been terminated.

Water Charges

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development if she has taken any steps to assess the impact of water charges on those over the state pension age and receiving at least one key benefit. (AQO 3242/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have participated in the Working Groups associated with water charges. The detailed proposals are a matter for the Minister of the Department for Regional Development, but when a charging scheme is finalised, I will study its impact on a range of less well off individuals and households. I have already commissioned work on how it will impact on social tenants.

Housing Executive

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development if the housing authority will be able to operate effectively following the loss of 350 jobs at the housing executive. (AQO 3322/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Yes. For the past two years the Housing Executive has been working on a Modernising Programme. This will deliver economies of scale through amalgamating "back office" functions into larger centres, whilst maintaining the level of service at District Offices.

Warm Homes Scheme

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the progress in addressing the delay in the provision of home surveys under the Warm Homes scheme to ensure that those in greatest need get help first. (AQO 3338/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Officials have been working closely with the Scheme Manager, Eaga plc, and I am pleased to report that all those people on the waiting list over 70 years old will have their homes surveyed by 30 June 2008.

Housing Selection Scheme

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm when the review of the housing selection scheme will be completed; and what is her assessment of the effectiveness of this scheme in areas of high demand. (AQO 3331/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Common Selection Scheme is kept under review and will continue to be so. It is regularly adapted to meet legislative changes. I am satisfied that the Scheme is fair and equitable based on the principle of need.

Homeless People

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the financial provision she makes for charities involved in supporting homeless people. (AQO 3312/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has provided £1.72 million in the last financial year 2007/08 to assist charities involved in supporting homeless people.

Staff Sickness

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the steps she has taken to reduce the level of sickness within her Department. (AQO 3241/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since taking office within the Department for Social Development I have recognised that sick absence levels within the Department are unacceptable. I have therefore been committed to ensuring that absence levels are reduced and have had a number of meetings with my Departmental Management Board on the subject.

While it is encouraging to note the general downward trend in absences over the past 12 months it is clear that further progress has to be made. I therefore receive regular detailed updates on my Department's current performance against sickness absence targets, action taken and ongoing initiatives across the Department.

I will continue to work with the aim of further improving the absence position in this Department. Recognising the overall role that the Department of Finance and Personnel have in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service staffing matters I also look forward with interest to any further proposals that may develop on the subject.

Benefit Take-Up

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what strategies are in place to improve benefit take-up. (AQO 3319/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Benefit Uptake is a key priority for me. My Department, through the Social Security Agency, provides a range of services to ensure that people are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits. This includes outreach services, participation in local promotional activity, the production of specific publications, the Department's internet site and general assistance with advice and information. The Housing Executive also plays a role by ensuring that all tenants are regularly made aware of the availability of assistance with rent and rate payments and where applicable, the Lone Pensioner Allowance.

In addition to this on-going activity, last May I launched the Social Security Agency's 2007/08 Benefit Uptake Programme to increase awareness of social security benefits. It aims to ensure that vulnerable clients are receiving their full benefit entitlement. The programme targeted 230,000 older people and focused on people with a disability/mental health problem, long-term illness, pensioners, carers and children/families. This Programme built upon those in 2005 and 2006, which resulted in over £7 million of additional benefit being paid to vulnerable people. The 2007/08 Programme will now be subject to a final evaluation in June 2008.

In the coming weeks, I will launch the Agency's 2008/09 Benefit Uptake Programme. This new Programme has been designed following a review of relevant research on poverty and social exclusion, lessons learned from previous Uptake Programmes and has considered ways to overcome the barriers preventing clients from claiming benefits.

Town Centres

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline (i) the work done to date; and (ii) current plans, to improve and support the public realms and shopping areas of (a) Banbridge; (b) Lurgan; and (c) Portadown, town centres. (AQO 3240/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department works closely with a number of statutory bodies including the local councils to improve and support public realms and shopping areas in Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown.

In Banbridge my Department delivered a major Public Realm improvement scheme covering the main shopping areas. The scheme cost £1.38 million with

my Department contributing £1.08 million. Currently, there are no plans for another scheme in Banbridge.

In Lurgan town centre, a major Comprehensive Development Scheme was delivered which brought about the redevelopment of underused land, with the construction of a new central distributor road, public car parks, major food store (Tesco's), housing and an extension to the existing library. Last year, a Public Realm scheme was designed for Craigavon Borough Council, who are actively seeking funding to deliver the scheme, including via a bid to Peace III. My Department is currently in discussion with Council to determine the quantum of contribution which we could make to deliver all, or part of the scheme, as part of a cocktail of funding.

In Portadown, a Contract for Funding is in place to deliver a £5.3 million Public Realm improvement scheme for the town centre, to be carried out over the next 3 years. My Department is contributing £1.5 million towards the scheme. A successful bid to OFMDFM delivered an additional £3.1 million from the Integrated Development Fund towards implementation. The scheme is seeking to enhance the physical environment of 13 streets in the town centre whilst keeping true to the town's original character.

Housing Priorities

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her housing priorities for the next three years. (AQO 3246/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have already identified the priority work streams that my Department has been charged to deliver over the next 3 years. First and foremost is the need to deliver the Social Housing Development Programme and in particular build the 5,250 new homes that are so obviously needed. I am confident this can be achieved and am encouraged by the fact that in the past year I have managed to deliver an extra 1,000 homes than was first forecast when I came into office.

I want to see a developer's contribution towards the provision of social and affordable housing introduced as soon as possible and we need to engage more with the private sector to see what they can deliver for us and how we can make more creative use of our assets.

Work to take forward a number of priority housing projects such as Girdwood, the Village and our new Eco-village in Enniskillen will be progressed.

Amongst my other priorities, I will introduce more shared future housing across the North, continue to tackle homelessness, increase spending to alleviate fuel poverty and bring forward new shared equity

opportunities to make housing more affordable for the many rather than the few

This is a challenging programme of work that reinforces my desire to deliver a new Housing Agenda that will make a difference.

Fuel Poverty

Mr McFarland asked the Minister for Social Development if the number of vulnerable households suffering from fuel poverty will be reduced to 20,000 by 2008 as outlined in the strategy document 'Ending Fuel Poverty'. (AQO 3311/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The rising cost of fuel has severely impacted my Department's progress towards meeting the targets set out in the 'Ending Fuel Poverty' strategy. However, I am committed to do all I can to alleviate fuel poverty and help those most in need. I have increased my Department's spending on fuel poverty to £35.4 million this year and I will bid in year for additional resources where opportunities arise.

Co-Ownership Schemes

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the reasons why the co-ownership housing association are not receiving new applications to buy in light of recent statements she has made to provide financial aid to this sector. (AQO 3325/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association announced on 18 March 2008 that it would not be able to accept applications with effect from close of business on 14 March 2008 due to demand outstripping available resources. The Association is starting the current year with a grant of £15 million – almost 4 times that of its opening grant in 2007/08. In line with the pledge given in the Programme for Government, at least 500 applicants will be supported this year.

Gambling Regulations

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to give her assessment of the reform of gambling regulations, particularly in relation to allowing betting shops to open on Sundays. (AQO 3252/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have given considerable thought to this matter having regard to the commercial interests involved including small businesses, the rise in Sunday events that attract

a betting audience and other forms of gambling that take place on a Sunday. Although I know there are those who have differing opinions, the response to my predecessor's consultation exercise demonstrated overwhelming support and I am convinced that there is a case for a change in the law to allow bookmaking offices to open for business on Sundays, subject to restricted hours. This would also provide greater parity with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

I intend shortly to seek the views of my Executive colleagues on such a change which would be accompanied, with the agreement of the Minister for Employment and Learning, by the provision of new employment protection rights for those employees who may not wish to work on Sundays.

i.e. The full size standard (dimensions: 12 ft x 6 ft) or the 'storm' flag (dimensions: 7 ½ ft x 3 ¾ ft). The decision is subjective and is based on the weather conditions at the time and what is forecast for the remainder of the day. The decision must also reflect health & safety concerns i.e. the possibility that the full standard may with strong winds and wet weather break free from the flagpole and fall to the ground injuring a passer by. On 21st April 2008 the storm flags were flown.

With regards to the Queens birthday in 2000, 2001 and 2002 we do not keep records of which flags were flown on past designated days however the decision would have been made as above.

Urban Development Grant Scheme

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on her plans to fund projects in Ballymoney from the Urban Development Grant scheme. (AQO 3239/08)

The Minister for Social Development:

Ballymoney is one of five regional towns involved in a pilot Urban Development Grant project administered by the Regional Development Office and for which money was set aside in the previous budget period.

Two projects from Ballymoney were invited to submit full applications and both are currently being appraised. However, my Department was not able to set money aside for this scheme from the CSR settlement but plan to review the position during in-year monitoring rounds.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Union Flag

Mr Wells asked the Assembly Commission to detail the dimensions of the two Union flags flown above Parliament Buildings on 21 April 2008, and the dimensions of the Union flag flown above Parliament Buildings on the Queen's Birthday in 2000, 2001 and 2002. (AQW 6350/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): Security Services Branch is responsible for ensuring that the union flags are flown above Parliament Buildings on the designated days.

A decision is made each morning prior to hoisting the flags as to which of the two sizes of flags to use

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 16 May 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Sexual Orientation Issues

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to comment on the absence of any references to sexual orientation issues within the draft Programme for Government. (AQW 2924/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): The draft Programme for Government makes it clear that fairness, inclusiveness and equality of opportunity will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes aimed at a shared and better future for all.

Meeting Requests

Mr Ross asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of meeting requests received by (i) the First Minister; (ii) the deputy First Minister; and (iii) the junior Ministers, since May 2007. (AQW 4023/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the period between 8 May 2007 and 30 April 2008, the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Junior Ministers received 817 requests for meetings and attendance at outside events.

167 of these requests were for joint meetings with the First Minister and deputy First Minister; 13 of these requests were for individual meetings with the First Minister; 22 of these requests were for individual meetings with the deputy First Minister and 108 were for meetings with the Junior Ministers.

Children in Severe Poverty

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail what constitutes 'severe poverty' in relation to children. (AQW 4038/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Within the Executive's recently produced Programme for Government 2008-2011, PSA 7 has a target to 'Work towards the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012.'

The PSA target is one of a number of targets which an anti poverty strategy, once agreed by the Executive, will aim to achieve.

A range of poverty measures will be considered by the Executive in order to monitor change in levels of child poverty including:

- relative income poverty;
- a mixed measure, combining material deprivation and low income which provides a wider measure of people's living standards; and
- absolute poverty reflecting whether the very poorest families are seeing their incomes rise in real terms.

There is no commonly accepted single measure of severe child poverty. However, in agreeing its strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion, as required under Section 16 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, the Executive will decide which indicators, using these statistics and others, to identify the number of children in greatest objective need.

Telephone Calls

Mr O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the actions taken by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, after the Department for Social Development reported telephone calls from the office of a junior Minister to an advisor to the Minister for Social Development. (AQW 4100/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have been advised that, following referral of this matter by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Social Development, the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service dealt with this matter by way of a private discussion with the Junior Minister.

Publication Spending

Mr Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount the department has spent on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last three years. (AQW 4877/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The following table sets out the amount the department has spent on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last three years.

Description	2004/05 (£)	2005/06 (£)	2006/07 (£)
Newspapers	17,216	14,317	14,752
Magazines	15,434	28,309	30,606
Periodicals	3,822	2,021	2,959

Foreign Head of State Visits

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it is consulted by the relevant authorities on the details of visits by foreign heads of State to Northern Ireland; and to explain if it is consulted in the clearance of politically sensitive comments made by a foreign head of State during a visit to Northern Ireland, including clearances that are handled by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. (AQW 5161/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Arrangements for visits by Heads of State to Northern Ireland are normally handled by the UK Government. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is usually advised in advance of the programme for such visits. We are not, however, routinely required, nor would it be appropriate, to clear the content of all comments that a Head of State may make while undertaking such a visit. We have not corresponded with the Office of the President of the Republic, the Office of the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland or any other relevant government authority in the Republic of Ireland in respect of any visits made by the President including her visit prior to Easter. Our officials are not normally involved in organising or evaluating the impact of visits by the President or any other visiting Heads of State.

Foreign Head of State Visits

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they have been consulted on all visits, both official and unofficial, that the President of the Republic of Ireland has made to Northern Ireland since 8 May 2007; and to detail all correspondence it has had with the Office of the President of the Republic of Ireland, the Office of the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, and any other relevant government authority in the Republic of Ireland, in respect of these visits. (AQW 5162/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Arrangements for visits by Heads of State to Northern Ireland are normally handled by the UK Government. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is usually advised in advance of the programme for such visits. We are not, however, routinely required, nor would it be appropriate, to clear the content of all comments that a Head of State may make while undertaking such a visit. We have not corresponded with the Office of the President of the Republic, the Office of the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland or any other relevant government authority in the Republic of Ireland in respect of any visits made by the President including her visit prior to Easter. Our officials are not normally involved in organising or evaluating the impact of visits by the President or any other visiting Heads of State.

Foreign Head of State Visits

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if Northern Ireland departments are involved in organising and evaluating the impact of visits by the President of the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland, with particular reference to the recent visit by the President of the Republic of Ireland during the visit of HM the Queen and HRH Prince Philip between Tuesday 18 March and Thursday 20 March. (AQW 5163/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Arrangements for visits by Heads of State to Northern Ireland are normally handled by the UK Government. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is usually advised in advance of the programme for such visits. We are not, however, routinely required, nor would it be appropriate, to clear the content of all comments that a Head of State may make while undertaking such a visit. We have not corresponded with the Office of the President of the Republic, the Office of the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland or any other relevant government authority in the Republic of Ireland in respect of any visits made by the President including her visit prior to Easter. Our officials are not normally involved in organising or evaluating the impact of visits by the President or any other visiting Heads of State.

Foreign Head of State Visits

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has made any representations to the President of the Republic of Ireland and the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, following recent remarks by the President of the Republic of Ireland linking a future visit of

Her Majesty the Queen to the Republic of Ireland to the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. (AQW 5164/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Arrangements for visits by Heads of State to Northern Ireland are normally handled by the UK Government. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is usually advised in advance of the programme for such visits. We are not, however, routinely required, nor would it be appropriate, to clear the content of all comments that a Head of State may make while undertaking such a visit. We have not corresponded with the Office of the President of the Republic, the Office of the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland or any other relevant government authority in the Republic of Ireland in respect of any visits made by the President including her visit prior to Easter. Our officials are not normally involved in organising or evaluating the impact of visits by the President or any other visiting Heads of State.

Interface Projects and Funding

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of interface workers based in North Belfast who are funded by the department; and (ii) the organisations in which these workers are based. (AQW 5965/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The number of groups which currently receive core funding in North Belfast is listed below. The groups are supported to assist with tackling interface issues including conflict resolution processes and therefore there is no differentiation made between the two activities for funding purposes.

There are sixteen posts currently funded in the following organisations:

- North West Belfast Parades Forum
- 174 Trust
- Intercomm
- North Belfast Interface Network / Ashton
- Linc Resource Centre
- InterAction
- Belfast Interface Project
- Linc Resource Centre / White City Initiative
- Forthspring.

The number of projects which have received Small Grants support in North Belfast for financial year 07/08 is listed below. These grants provide funding to projects which assist with tackling interface issues and conflict resolution processes.

- Belfast Interface Project
- Ashton Community Trust
- InterAction Belfast
- Greencastle CEP
- Greencastle Community Festival
- North Belfast Alternatives

Interface Projects and Funding

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of conflict resolution projects and workers based in North Belfast who are funded by the department; and (ii) the organisations in which these projects and workers are based. (AQW 5966/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The number of groups which currently receive core funding in North Belfast is listed below. The groups are supported to assist with tackling interface issues including conflict resolution processes and therefore there is no differentiation made between the two activities for funding purposes.

There are sixteen posts currently funded in the following organisations:

- North West Belfast Parades Forum
- 174 Trust
- Intercomm
- North Belfast Interface Network / Ashton
- Linc Resource Centre
- InterAction
- Belfast Interface Project
- Linc Resource Centre / White City Initiative
- Forthspring.

The number of projects which have received Small Grants support in North Belfast for financial year 07/08 is listed below. These grants provide funding to projects which assist with tackling interface issues and conflict resolution processes.

- Belfast Interface Project
- Ashton Community Trust
- InterAction Belfast
- Greencastle CEP
- Greencastle Community Festival
- North Belfast Alternatives

Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the amount of

funding available since devolution to support victims of terrorist violence; and (ii) any plans for future funding. (AQW 5986/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Following the Budget announcement earlier this year, £36 million has been allocated to programmes to support victims and survivors over the next three years. We intend to bring forward detailed proposals soon which will outline our plans for a comprehensive approach to funding in the sector. We will also be making an announcement shortly in relation to the interim funding arrangement.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2962/08, to outline the specific measurement difficulties for each of those targets in table five in the Sustainable Development Strategy and how it plans to address these targets with measurement difficulties.

(AQW 6064/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Further to the answer provided to AQW 2962/08, details of the measurement difficulties associated with 4 of the 63 Sustainable Development Targets, the proposed means of addressing these measurement difficulties are set out in the table below.

TABLE 1: DETAILS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SD) TARGETS WITH MEASUREMENT DIFFICULTIES

	Target	Problem	Suggested Means of Redress
1	Northern Ireland economy will achieve 85% resource efficiency by 2025.	The resource efficiency indicator is prone to different definitions and interpretations of what should be in it and, as a consequence, potentially wide variations in the result.	Replace with new target based on material productivity and material intensity. These indicators link resource use to economic activity.
10	Increase Northern Ireland's forested area by at least 500 hectares per annum in line with Northern Ireland Forestry Strategy – A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth.	At present, DARD has no means of measuring loss of woodland. Data is only available on new woodland. Target is therefore not measurable.	Align with Programme for Government (PfG) key goal for increasing forest and woodland.

	Target	Problem	Suggested Means of Redress
22	Reduce the productivity gap (1) between Northern Ireland and other UK regions; and (2) between the Northern Ireland average and the most deprived communities.	Data is not available to measure the productivity of deprived and non-deprived communities.	Align with PfG key goals for productivity and addressing disadvantage/poverty.
23	Reduce the skills gap between Northern Ireland and other UK regions and between the Northern Ireland average and the most deprived communities.	Data is not available to compare the skill levels of deprived and non-deprived communities on a regular basis.	Align with PfG key goals for skills.

Social Inequality

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that the Executive is committed to (i) the elimination of all forms of inequality; (ii) proactively changing the existing patterns of social disadvantage by using (a) increased prosperity to tackle ongoing poverty; and (b) economic growth to tackle inequality; (iii) developing new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage; and (iv) targeting resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need. (AQW 6362/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are happy to reaffirm the Executive's commitment, as detailed in our Programme for Government, to the elimination of all forms of inequality, to proactively change existing patterns of social disadvantage using increased prosperity and economic growth to tackle ongoing poverty and inequality and to developing new and innovative measures that will address socio-economic disadvantage. Targeting resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need is an integral part of that commitment.

Child Poverty Strategy 2020

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) plans; and (ii) funding available, to ensure that children's play is coordinated as part of the Child Poverty Strategy for 2020. (AQW 6417/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

On 24 October 2006, the former Minister for Children and Young People, Maria Eagle MP, launched a 12-week consultation on a draft Play Policy. The aim of the policy is to establish play within a policy framework that will place high value on play as an essential element in the development of children's lives, families, communities and society.

The play policy is set within the context of the 10-year strategy and will contribute to the delivery of many of our strategic aims, particularly those which relate to improved health and achievement outcomes. The draft consultation document was produced in co-operation with a number of key stakeholders in the field of play, including PlayBoard and NIPPA – The Early Years Organisation, now Early Years. The Commissioner for Children and Young People also played an oversight role during the development of the draft policy. The play policy, which is aimed at children aged 0-18 years will be implemented in two phases one for 0-11 years and one for 12-18 years.

An analysis of the responses to public consultation has now been published. This will be followed by the publication of the revised policy, the establishment of an implementation group and the drawing up of action plans. Junior Ministers have recently approved the policy statement and have sent it to the Committee for OFMDFM for comment.

We are acutely aware of the needs of children living in poverty and the benefits that play can bring and will ensure that this is fully considered as the action plan for play and leisure is developed.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of working days lost by their Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6435/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The table below sets out the total number of working days lost by OFMDFM due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months.

2006/07 FINANCIAL YEAR

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
37	21	22	-	4	32	10	26	-	31	48	68

2007/08 FINANCIAL YEAR

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
56	32	33	26	38	21	27	41	34	26	13	3

Integrated Development Fund

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the reasons for excluding Ardoyne and New Lodge Wards from project funding for Local Implementation Action Groups (LIAG) as part of the Integrated Development Fund; and (ii) to confirm whether this decision was subject to an equality impact assessment. (AQW 6437/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Integrated Development Fund (IDF) was launched in August 2003 on a pilot basis by the then Minister, Ian Pearson MP. For the purposes of the pilot phase, the scope of the Fund was restricted to four areas: the North West, West Belfast/Greater Shankill, South Down Fishing Villages and Portadown.

These areas were selected by the Minister on the basis of a range of socio-economic factors including: evidence of long-standing infrastructure weaknesses; the need to tackle the consequences of declining industries; the opportunity and potential to make a significant contribution to the economy here; and, the strength of their existing partnerships and taskforces and integrated development strategies.

One of the qualifying conditions for the operation of the fund was that bid proposals should be consistent with policy in relation to promoting equality and good relations and statutory obligations on equality (NI Act 1998, Section 75) and policy commitments to New Targeting Social Need as outlined in "Vision In Practice".

The IDF did not proceed beyond the pilot phase. Following its Comprehensive Spending Review considerations last year, the Executive decided that the Budget, Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and Programme for Government 2008-11 would not contain proposals for any further investment in central funds, including the IDF.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the websites that come under the Office's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6441/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of OFMDFM. The table includes the number of visitors since 8 May 2007 as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visits to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement.

The figures for www.newfuturemazelongkesh.com are only available from September 2007.

It is not possible to provide a figure on the cost of maintaining each site as a disaggregated figure for site maintenance is not held.

WEBSITES THAT COME UNDER THE OFFICE'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Website	Visitors	Page views
www.northernireland.gov.uk	553,858	3,627,354
www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk	142,667	564,936
www.rpani.gov.uk	28,441	535,263
www.allchildrenni.gov.uk	23,766	150,222
www.nitakeacloserlook.gov.uk	17,213	119,562
www.ocpani.gov.uk	4,361	61,538
www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk	26,859	46,164
www.newfuturemazelongkesh.com	3,390	42,461
www.researchni.gov.uk	3,065	32,546
www.hmdni.org	1,548	4,398

Loughry Police Training College

Mr McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what correspondence it has had with the Northern Ireland Office since devolution in relation to delays in the provision of a new police training college at Loughrey; and to place copies of this correspondence in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 6640/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

There has been no correspondence between the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Northern Ireland Office about the provision of a new police training college at Loughry.

Funding for Children's Issues

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the role played by the Junior Ministers with responsibility for children,

in acquiring funding for children's issues in the 2008-2009 Budget. (AQW 6641/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Junior Ministers strongly made the case for significant funding for children's services in pre-budget discussions and succeeded in securing an allocation of £26 million to DE, DHSSPS and DCAL to facilitate the continuation of projects previously funded by the Children and Young People's Funding Package in addition to a range of mainstream programmes.

While the allocation of Departmental budgets remains at the discretion of individual Ministers, Junior Ministers also met with Ministerial colleagues to urge them to mainstream and protect funding for children and young people within their departmental budgets.

Junior Ministers held discussions with relevant Ministers on the issue of services formerly funded through the Children's Fund and secured agreement that all 89 projects would receive funding for one more year, until March 2009.

Extended Schools Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding it has provided for Extended Schools during 2008-2009.

(AQW 6642/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not fund the Extended Schools programme. That is the responsibility of the Department of Education.

Fuel and Food Costs

Mr Cree asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the impact of the recent rise in fuel and food costs on child poverty, and to detail any actions it is intending to take to help those families who are living in worsening situations of poverty. (AQO 3374/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The impact of rising fuel costs on the number of children in households experiencing fuel poverty is being investigated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the results of this investigation are expected by the end of May. The analysis will take into consideration recent trends in household income from the Family Resources Survey and data from the House Condition Survey as well as the fuel price index.

In addition to this, our statisticians have prepared a theoretical analysis on the differential impact of a range of increases in household expenditure

on 'necessities' between low and high income households. The findings of this analysis clearly show that increases in household expenditure on necessities such as food and fuel have an added adverse impact for lower income households in contrast with the impact for households with higher levels of income.

Price rises may impact on a household's expenditure in terms of its consumption of food, fuel and other necessities but not immediately on its level of income which is the conventional basis upon which poverty is calculated.

Tackling poverty and its causes, including poverty brought about through price increases in basic necessities requires concerted, co-ordinated action across a range of Departmental programmes which collectively can address the many cross cutting issues including employment, education, health and social development.

It is expected therefore that Departments will, in line with previous practice, continue to seek to identify those most at risk of poverty and to concentrate efforts and resources towards those in greatest objective need.

In line with its statutory obligations under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Executive will soon receive proposals from our department for the adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here based on objective need. The adoption proposals have recently been outlined to the departmental Committee and we await its comments

Fuel and Food Costs

Ms J McCann asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the recommendations it will be making to the Executive to ensure that the necessary measures are put in place to alleviate the impact that rising fuel prices will have on (i) families; and (ii) child poverty. (AQO 3443/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The impact of rising fuel costs on the number of children in households experiencing fuel poverty is being investigated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the results of this investigation is expected by the end of May. The analysis will take into consideration recent trends in household income from the Family Resources Survey and data from the House Condition Survey as well as the fuel price index.

In addition to this, our statisticians have prepared a theoretical analysis on the differential impact of a range of increases in household expenditure on 'necessities' between low and high income households. The findings of this analysis clearly show

that increases in household expenditure on necessities such as food and fuel have an added adverse impact for lower income households in contrast with the impact for households with higher levels of income.

Price rises may impact on a household's expenditure in terms of its consumption of food, fuel and other necessities but not immediately on its level of income which is the conventional basis upon which poverty is calculated.

Tackling poverty and its causes, including poverty brought about through price increases in basic necessities requires concerted, co-ordinated action across a range of Departmental programmes which collectively can address the many cross cutting issues including employment, education, health and social development.

It is expected therefore that Departments will, in line with previous practice, continue to seek to identify those most at risk of poverty and to concentrate efforts and resources towards those in greatest objective need.

In line with its statutory obligations under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Executive will soon receive proposals from our department for the adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here based on objective need. The adoption proposals have recently been outlined to the departmental Committee and we await its comments.

Public Service Agreement 7

Ms Lo asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the role it envisages the Department of Social Development playing in achieving Public Service Agreement 7, Objective 2. (AQO 3446/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Public Service Agreement 7, Objective 2 states that it is to take forward co-ordinated strategic action to promote social inclusion for Lone parents, People with physical/sensory disability, Older people and New and established Minority Ethnic Communities.

The Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Initiative involves Departments working together and with partners outside Government to improve and enhance the circumstances of those at risk of social exclusion, by identifying and tackling factors that could contribute to social exclusion and which would be best dealt with in a co-ordinated way. It also involves consideration of positive initiatives to facilitate and encourage social inclusion.

The Department for Social Development is a key player in the PSI initiatives for vulnerable groups

along with other departments. That department's contribution to each of the PSI groups will vary according to the issues pertinent to lone parents, people with disabilities, older people and minority ethnic communities in the areas of housing, benefits, regeneration and the Child Support Agency.

Government Arrangements since Devolution

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the effectiveness of its machinery of government arrangements since devolution. (AQO 3448/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Following the early bedding in of processes and procedures, the machinery of government has operated successfully over the last year. The Executive has met on 25 occasions at which more than 200 papers have been considered. The Executive has introduced 14 Bills since May 2007 – 7 of which have already been enacted. It is anticipated that a further 9 Bills will be introduced before the summer recess.

Within the first nine months of devolution, this Executive, following full consultation, put in place, for the first time, a joined up 3-year Programme for Government and Budget setting out our priorities with expenditure allocations, along with a 10 year Investment Strategy setting out the framework for critical infrastructure investment. We have ensured that the Investment Strategy is shaped at a strategic level to support fully the aims and goals set out in the Programme for Government. That remains a remarkable achievement. Our approach has been widely welcomed, with the CBI suggesting it provides for “a more strategic and outcome-focused Programme with ambitious goals agreed by the entire Executive”.

The priorities and commitments we have set out in that Programme for Government and Investment Strategy demonstrate very clearly how we as Executive are determined to work together to ensure that the money we spend will actually make a difference and deliver real benefits and value for all our people.

In addition to publishing an agreed Programme for Government, Investment Strategy and Budget, a number of other key decisions have been implemented in the last twelve months, including the decision in principle to establish an Office of a Commissioner for Older People, the introduction of legislation to provide for a Commission for Victims and Survivors, legislation aimed at improving the lives of people with disabilities and the holding of a hugely successful US/NI Investment Conference last week.

On occasion, matters may not have progressed as quickly as we would have hoped but this has been

because they were sensitive and difficult issues where time was required for full and careful consideration.

The overall output of all Executive Ministers as we have just outlined clearly shows the achievements of the last year and the success of the machinery of government.

Good Relations Indicators

Mr McKay asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the recently released Good Relations Indicators. (AQO 3441/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

An update of the good relations indicators was published on 30 April 2008. It is available on the OFMDFM website.

The update indicates a relative decrease in sectarianism but a worrying increase in recorded racist incidents and crimes and incidents and crimes motivated by religion. The indicators give us a very clear view of the scale of the challenge we all have to meet in building a “shared and better future” for everyone.

And that challenge is pressing. As we said in the Programme for Government, “progress has been made, but at a time when our society is being transformed, sectarianism, racism and intolerance are still too evident. They mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society.

While the drop in sectarian incidents is very welcome we should not take comfort in it. And we must not kid ourselves that we can tackle sectarianism without tackling racism or hate crime motivated by religion. These evils feed off one another and sustain each other.

We and the Executive are committed to zero tolerance to hate crime in any of its forms. And we are backing this commitment with extra resources – the budget commits an additional £7.5million over the next 3 years to tackle racism, sectarianism and hate crime motivated by religion.

The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, which we hope to announce shortly, will provide a robust and effective framework for the efforts by many at all levels to tackle these scourges.

Subcommittee for Children and Young People

Miss McIlveen asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the

agreed priorities of the Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People. (AQO 3384/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Ministerial Sub-Committee has agreed 6 key priorities in principle and our Ministerial colleagues have been asked to agree the final wording. The priorities as they currently stand are:

- a holistic and comprehensive approach to child poverty;
- a comprehensive early years strategy that focuses on the development and wellbeing of each child, including affordable access to high quality early years provision for families living in areas of disadvantage and poverty in urban and rural areas;
- provision that deals with vulnerable young people particularly issues with risky behaviour, alcohol, drug abuse and suicide;
- safeguarding, including support for parents, families and carers;
- provision for children with a disability or mental health condition including learning disabled resettlement into the community, new or enhanced respite packages, autism review and transitions from schools, including special schools, to the most appropriate provision for the next stage; and
- provision of school buses, road safety and transport issues.

The Sub-Committee has also agreed to set up a number of sub-groups of officials – one for each key priority, to include the relevant departments. These sub-groups will report back to the Ministerial Sub-Committee.

Victims' Commissioners

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that any legislation governing the Victims Commissioners should include a definition of the term 'victim'; and a procedure for managing differences of opinion between the four commissioners. (AQO 3369/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 includes a definition of the term victim and survivor. The Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill has been amended to ensure that the work of the Commission will not be impeded by any potential disagreement between the Commissioners.

Disability Action Proposed Relocation

Mr McCartney asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm if it

supports the Disability Action proposal to develop a North West Centre of Excellence at Ebrington Centre. (AQO 3462/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We support the Disability Action proposal to relocate and develop a Centre of Excellence on the Ebrington site as this proposal is entirely within the objectives of the Ebrington masterplan.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr Butler asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the impact the lack of development at the former Maze/Long Kesh site will have on the transfer of other former military bases to the Executive. (AQO 3440/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Development plans for the Maze/Long Kesh site are being progressed in line with the unanimous recommendations of the multi-Party Consultation Panel's recommendations and the Masterplan for the site. We know that as vice chair of the later political monitoring group, you played a strong role along with colleagues from other parties in progressing plans for the potential development of the former prison and army base.

We are sure you are aware that a development of this size and importance takes time to prepare, and it is vital not only to get it right but also to ensure that best practice is followed so that the site is developed to its best potential for the whole community, and that the public interest is safeguarded.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is currently assessing the Outline Business Case for the site in terms of affordability and value for money and the DFP Minister has recently stated publicly his intention to give his departmental officials unedited appraisal of the Maze/Long Kesh proposal, including the outcome of bids by private sector developers for involvement in the potential regeneration, to the Executive before the end of May 2008.

Development of preparatory work for the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh site has been considerable, and proposals are at an advanced stage, but similar positive development of the other former military sites has also taken place. For example action taken in relation to the sites at Malone Road and Crumlin Road in Belfast are indications of successes in this area – the proceeds of the sale of the army base at Windsor Park have been ring-fenced for use in the re-development of the Crumlin Road gaol, located in one of Belfast's poorest wards, where currently a masterplan is under consideration. A schools campus will also be built by the North Eastern Education Board on the site of the army base at Magherafelt.

Plans for the development of the former military barracks at Ebrington in Derry/Londonderry are already underway and the Junior Ministers visited the site on 1 May 2008 to show their support for the development, where an iconic footbridge will be built linking the two sides of the city to become a central and powerfully symbolic feature of the regeneration of the city.

The development of such sites is considerable and OFMDFM's primary aim is to have several other sites gifted by the UK Government in line with expectations raised as a result of previous Joint Declaration commitments on de-militarisation.

We are mindful that the Secretary of State indicated that lack of development of the Maze/Long Kesh site could weaken our hand in future discussions about the gifting of sites, but hope that the substantial progress in preparation for a decision at the Maze/Long Kesh site in accordance with the Masterplan and the positive development at other sites will be seen positively and that we will be successful in our continuing aim to have similar sites gifted to aid the regeneration and growth that we all expected to see as a result of the peace process.

Hate Crime

Mr A Maskey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the steps it has taken (i) to tackle hate crime; and (ii) to enhance community safety. (AQO 3442/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Executive is committed to tackling intolerance, prejudice and bigotry wherever and however they occur.

As you are aware, the term "hate crime" is usually defined as crime motivated by, or aggravated by, hostility based on a victim's membership, or presumed membership, of a racial group, religious group, a sexual orientation group or status as a person with a disability.

While criminal justice matters remain to be transferred we will work closely with the police service and criminal justice agencies to tackle all aspects of hate crime and to address community safety issues.

We are actively engaged with a wide range of partners to tackle attitudes and behaviours that foster hate crime and to reduce the levels of hate crime. People have a right to live without fear of hate crime. We support actions which are transforming the way that individuals and groups act, and we are encouraged by the groundswell of determination to tackle hate crime through the community-based projects we support.

Actions include youth projects, community bonfire initiatives, flags and emblems protocols, conflict resolution programmes and research to inform future policy development. Our support, for example, of summer diversionary actions and the maintenance of mobile phone networks for interface workers serve to reduce sectarian tensions during the summer parades. We also support groups working to help minority ethnic people and migrant workers integrate with host communities.

We will shortly bring forward detailed proposals for the 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future' which was detailed in the Programme for Government. At the core of these proposals will be action to tackle racism, sectarianism and intolerance. The programme will build on some of the excellent work, particularly at the local level, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Community safety is best secured by building relationships between people – and relationship-building will be at the centre of the programme.

Our progress in tackling sectarian and racist hate crime will be monitored through a comprehensive set of good relations indicators and measured against the Baseline Report published in January 2007.

It is essential that victims of any form of hate crime have the confidence to report offences and that they will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with through due legal process. 2006-07 saw a welcome decrease of some 30% in reported crimes motivated by homophobia or prejudice against disability. We cannot however, be complacent and we are committed to a zero tolerance approach to hate crime in any of its manifestations. This is a top priority for the Executive. It must also be a top priority for all politicians, communities and policy makers.

As regards incidents of hate crime with a disability motivation, we have commissioned research from the Institute of Conflict Research to inform the evidence base for policy formulation and development of hate crimes against people with a disability. The project involves stakeholders from within the NI Administration and PSNI and organisations from within the disability sector. The research is due for completion by the end of 2008.

We will keep under review and where appropriate strengthen provisions that cover harassment and bullying of people on the grounds of disability in areas of employment, training and the receipt of facilities, goods and services.

Drumcree/Garvaghy Road

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any work it has

undertaken to help establish a dialogue process to obtain a long-term resolution to the parading dispute at Drumcree/Garvaghy Road. (AQO 3344/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

No such work has been undertaken by our Department.

Poverty in Northern Ireland

Mr O'Dowd asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the action it is taking to tackle poverty. (AQO 3438/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are responsible for setting the strategic direction for tackling poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland, by way of the production of an overarching anti-poverty strategy and for the subsequent measuring and reporting of progress against the strategy's goals, objectives and targets.

Meeting the goals, objectives and targets of an anti-poverty strategy is reliant upon the delivery of a range of departmental programmes and initiatives in areas such as employment, education, health and social development. In delivering these programmes and initiatives, departments, in line with previous practice, continue to direct their efforts and resources towards those in greatest objective need.

Allied to the statutory obligation set out in Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we will soon be submitting proposals to the Executive for the adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here based on objective need.

Joint Ministerial Committee

Mr Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its plans for the development of the Joint Ministerial Committee. (AQO 3364/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We recently met Paul Murphy, Secretary of State for Wales, who has been asked by Gordon Brown to lead on devolution issues, to discuss plans for the future role and organisation of the Joint Ministerial Committee. We propose to attend the next meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee which is scheduled to take place before summer 2008.

Poverty in Northern Ireland

Mrs McGill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the steps it is taking to promote joint working with the Government

of the Republic of Ireland on anti poverty and social inclusion. (AQO 3450/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The United Kingdom's and Ireland's National Action Plans (NAPs) on Social Inclusion, published in 2006, included 'common text' covering co-operation between the two Governments in the field of poverty and social exclusion. In addition, through the British Irish Council, our officials have worked with colleagues in different jurisdictions, sharing experience and best practice in the field of Social Exclusion.

The common text which appeared in the NAPs commits the two governments to consider both existing and potential new areas of co-operation in the field of poverty and social inclusion. In line with this commitment, officials in OFMDFM and the Department of Social and Family Affairs produced, in February 2007, a 'Joint Report' which provided examples of existing and ongoing North/South social inclusion work, in areas such as Transport, Health, Education and Research.

The Report recommended that the two governments jointly commission a series of studies to examine areas of existing and potential co-operation in more detail. The first study would focus on poverty in early years while subsequent phases would look at the working age, later years, and, finally, at cross-cutting issues, such as financial exclusion, fuel poverty and e-inclusion. We are currently considering this report.

Equal Rights and Social Need Division

Mrs O'Neill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the work of its disability unit. (AQO 3437/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Equality/Rights and Social Need Division within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is responsible for taking forward disability legislation and for developing cross-cutting policy on a range of Promoting Social Inclusion issues including disability.

We are working with a broad range of colleagues and partners to progress issues to improve the lives of disabled people. This includes working with colleagues in:-

- DOE & DRD (who hold the policy responsibility), to bring forward Regulations to remove the exemption for operators of transport services from Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. (Part III makes it unlawful for the providers of services to discriminate against people with a disability in the provision of goods, facilities and services).

- the Office for Disability Issues towards ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- the Department for Transport to amend the Civil Aviation (Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility) Regulations 2007 to allow the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to be a designated body for the purposes of the Regulations to support any complainants who meet the DDA definition of disability and consider they have been discriminated against.
- the Department for Work and Pensions on potential Regulations arising out of the case of Coleman v Attridge Law which is currently before the European Court of Justice.

The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Disability was established to examine the barriers to participation experienced by people with disabilities in Northern Ireland which contribute to their relative poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion, and to make recommendations on how these might be removed.

Membership of the Group includes representatives from all Government Departments, a range of voluntary organisations, trade unions, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The remit of the Working Group is to examine the barriers to employment, education, transport, housing, access to information and lifelong learning for disabled people in Northern Ireland, and to make recommendations on how these might be removed. Five Subgroups were established to take forward the work and additional organisations were co-opted to examine the issues in detail.

The Subgroups are currently finalising their individual reports and the key issues will then migrate into recommendations for Northern Ireland Departments, Public Bodies and Statutory Agencies. The final report will be presented for our consideration in 2008.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of working days lost by her Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months.
(AQW 6436/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): For the purpose of answering the question, the figures provided in the table below detail the number of working days lost due to illness, which were directly attributed to stress in each of the last 24 months from 1 April 2006 until 31 March 2008. These figures relate to DARD's entire workforce including industrial and non-industrial staff and staff employed in the Department's 2 Executive Agencies.

Apr-06	May-06	Jun-06	Jul-06	Aug-06	Sep-06	Oct-06	Nov-06	Dec-06	Jan-07	Feb-07	Mar-07
195	218	241	379	351	299	373	321	339	346	265	266

Apr-07	May-07	Jun-07	Jul-07	Aug-07	Sep-07	Oct-07	Nov-07	Dec-07	Jan-08	Feb-08	Mar-08
265	268	307	352	363	333	424	326	351	314	246	269

The total number of working days lost due to stress related absence in 2006/07 was 3593 days and 3818 in 2007/08.

Focus Farm Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of funding delivered to establish Focus Farms under the European Union Peace and Reconciliation programme measure 1.6.
(AQW 6471/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Focus Farm programme 2004-2007 was a successful attempt to boost the competitiveness of agricultural and horticultural businesses through the establishment of on-farm training facilities across the North of Ireland and the encouragement of peer-led learning.

Some £2.2 million was allocated to meet those objectives, with the programme funded through the Special EU Programmes Body under measure 1.6 of the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and implemented by Rural Development Division.

Following the success of the first programme, a Focus Farm measure is among those being brought forward under Axis 1 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the role of the Rural

Development Programme Oversight committee and to detail the process of selecting the members of this committee. (AQW 6472/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Oversight Committee was established to monitor and evaluate progress with the initiation and establishment of the delivery mechanism for Axis 3 of the new Rural Development Programme against the agreed milestones and also to ensure that good communication was achieved with all stakeholders throughout the process. The agreed milestones to be initiated and established include identification of self-defined geographical areas of operation for the council cluster; contract with the cluster and identification of lead Council for development of regeneration strategy; one Local Action Group per cluster area; and councils formed as joint committee to deliver to end of programme. The committee also has a role in offering proposals to DARD on how the councils can be best assisted to meet the requirements of the milestones and reporting progress or current risks back to DARD and myself. I have agreed that the committee should remain in place until the Joint Committees have accepted the Terms and Conditions of their Contract to deliver Axis 3.

This Oversight Committee is set up in the same vein as the Rural Childcare Strategy Working Group in that it is not on a statutory basis and only expenses are reimbursed. Originally 10 nominations together with the relevant background briefing on experience and interests were put forward by DARD. My selection of the current 4 members was made in order to get as a wide representation as possible of rural affairs on the Committee.

Biomass Energy

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's assessment of the number of jobs created over the last 5 years from energy generation from biomass; and to detail the potential for job creation in this area over the next (i) 5 years; and (ii) 10 years. (AQW 6483/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD does not assess the number of jobs created in connection with energy generation from biomass. Currently, the Department does not gather or store information relating to job creation related to energy generation from biomass at farm level.

However, given that this emerging technology may become more commercially viable, DARD recognises that the development of the renewables sector may have the potential to create job opportunities.

Agricultural Waste Energy

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's assessment of the number of jobs created over the last 5 years from energy generation from agricultural waste; and to detail the potential for job creation in this area over the next (i) 5 years; and (ii) 10 years. (AQW 6484/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD does not assess the number of jobs created in connection with energy generation from agricultural waste. Currently, the Department does not gather or store information relating to job creation related to energy generation from agricultural waste, at farm level.

However, given that this emerging technology may become more commercially viable, DARD recognises that the development of the renewables sector may have the potential to create job opportunities.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of single farm payments that are still outstanding, broken down by County and postcode. (AQW 6537/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: At 30 April 2008, a total of 1,074 applications submitted under the 2007 Single Farm Payment Scheme were not finalised. A breakdown of these claims by county (Table 1) and by postcode (Table 2) is attached.

A payment may not be due in all cases due to ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Animal Carcasses

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the risk of cattle related diseases spreading in the vicinity of animal carcass disposal plants. (AQW 6587/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Plants which dispose of animal carcasses are inspected and approved by DARD to ensure that their operations minimise the risks to human or animal health. These inspections include site biosecurity and standard operating procedures at the plant.

Departmental Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the websites that come

under her Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6604/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table provides details in respect of the websites that are the responsibility of DARD. It includes the number of visitors and page views for the 5 relevant sites since devolution up to 30 April 2008. Information on page views has been included as the number of visitors to sites is not regarded as an accurate measure.

It is not possible to provide an overall figure for the cost of maintaining these sites as a disaggregated figure for site maintenance is not held.

Website	Visitors	Page Views
www.dardni.gov.uk	194,306	1,569,674
www.ruralni.gov.uk	305,708	1,023,663
www.cafre.ac.uk	88,596	704,610
www.forestserviceni.gov.uk	88,294	451,015
www.riversagencyni.gov.uk	23,919	177,567

Fishing Boats Fuel Consumption

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the current cost of a litre of fuel used by local fishing vessels; (ii) the average number of litres of fuel used per week by fishing boats over 10 metres in length; (iii) the number of litres of fuel which will be saved through the implementation of efficiency schemes she has proposed; and (iv) to give a timescale within which these measures will be delivered. (AQW 6625/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) The current cost of a litre of fuel used by local fishing vessels.

The average UK price (excluding taxes) of a litre of diesel is estimated at 50 ppl for April 2008. This compares to 43 ppl for January 2008.

- (ii) The average number of litres of fuel used per week by fishing boats over 10 metres in length.

The Sea Fish Industry Authority (SFIA) carries out Economic Surveys of the Fishing Fleet by sea area and fishing gear employed. The table below gives estimated annual fuel consumption and consumption per day, for sampled, single rig and twin rig nephrops vessels fishing in the Irish Sea.

	Average length (metres)	Annual Fuel and Oil consumption (litres)	Average days fished per vessel (days)	Estimated Fuel and Oil consumed per day fished (litres)
IS Single rig Nephrops trawler	17.2	60,674	161	377
IS Twin rig Nephrops trawler	18.6	111,236	178	625

Source: from 2005 economic Survey of the UK Fishing Fleet, Sea fish Industry Authority January 2008. Based on average 2005 fuel price 26.7 ppl.

- (iii) The number of litres of fuel which will be saved through the implementation of efficiency schemes she has proposed.
- (iv) To give a timescale within which these measures will be delivered.

As I said in my statement to the Assembly on 28 April, there is no single solution that that can be applied to all vessels in the fleet. The SFIA has carried out and continues to carry out significant research on fuel saving measures barriers to their uptake. The measures suitable for individual vessels will vary widely according to factors such as, vessel size, design and fishery. I want to see every opportunity explored to take advantage of that work to ensure that the fleet's fuel bill is reduced. We can assist the industry financially now through the current Financial Instruments for Fisheries Guidance funding and later in the year through the European Fisheries Fund. However, it is for the industry to decide what measures it wants to adopt and to make proposals to the Department.

Fish Stock in Irish Sea

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the scientific evidence in support of her assessment that it will take time to rebuild the haddock and herring sector of the fishing industry. (AQW 6627/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Recent fisheries independent information indicated a prolonged period of above average haddock recruitment and a strong herring year-class recruiting into the fishery. These are based on survey results only and are indications of increasing stocks. However, due to the lack of an analytical catch at age based assessment, the status of the haddock and herring stocks in the Irish Sea are uncertain.

In the absence of an absolute estimate in fishing mortality for the haddock and herring stocks in the

Irish Sea, coupled with indications of increasing stock sizes, the ICES scientific advice has been not to increase fishing effort. This advice is precautionary due to the uncertainty in stock status. The haddock Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is further influenced by the cod recovery measures in the Irish Sea.

The EU harvest control rules dictate a maximum annual change in TAC of 15% (for stocks not under a recovery plan). An increase in stock size and a resulting increase in TAC will thus be a step-wise process that will have a lagged response in terms of the expansion of the fishing sector targeting those fisheries.

Fish Stock in Irish Sea

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide a comprehensive account of the work that has been completed in the last three years in monitoring the success of the annual closure of the Irish Sea cod fishery. (AQW 6629/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In 2006, a new 5-year joint project was established between AFBI and CEFAS, with the aim of monitoring cod recovery in the Irish Sea, using a new technique, which relies on capture of recently spawned cod eggs. Estimates of spawning cod numbers are calculated from egg survey counts and the average egg yield of mature cod.

Due to the limitations of conventional stock assessment techniques, this new study is required to accurately monitor stock status under circumstances where abundance is particularly low, as with cod in the Irish Sea.

While the technique is still being developed and the final results must await the refinement and international quality assurance of the methodology, preliminary results from the 2006 egg surveys indicate that cod abundance in the Irish Sea is currently low and comparable to that indicated by conventional assessments.

Fish Stock in Irish Sea

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money her Department has allocated to assess the effectiveness of the annual closure of the Irish Sea cod fishery, for each of the last five years. (AQW 6630/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Prior to 2005/06, monitoring of cod stock status in the Irish Sea was costed within the overall marine fish stock assessment activities carried out by AFBI and it is not possible to separate the cost for each species.

From 2006, a specific new 5-year study of cod recovery in the Irish Sea is being carried out jointly by AFBI and The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) and comprises intensive fishery independent surveys of cod status throughout the Irish Sea, including the cod closure area.

Since the project started, DARD has allocated the following funding to it:

2005/06	£100,345
2006/07	£133,098
2007/08	£133,841

Icelandic and Faroese Fisheries

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the work that has been completed by her Department in the studies of the (i) Icelandic; and (ii) Faroese fisheries model, and the cost of these studies. (AQW 6631/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department has carried out no studies of the Icelandic and Faroese fisheries models. It has, however, provided £43,100 financial support for a project, undertaken by the Anglo North Irish Fish Producers Organisation, to research alternative fisheries management science. The proposal included research by an Icelandic consultant and a fact-finding visit to the Faroe Islands by local fishermen and government scientists. The Department has not yet received the final evaluation report for the project.

Publicity and Advertising Costs

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of money spent by her Department on publicity and advertising in 2007-08. (AQW 6653/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table details the amount spent on publicity and advertising by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the 2007/2008 financial year.

	Total amount spent on publicity & Advertising
1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008	£359,749

Animal Welfare Legislation

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to report on the progress made

in relation to the production of an outcome paper arising from the 2006 consultation on animal welfare. (AQW 6658/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As animal welfare legislation in the North is now more than 30 years old, there is clearly a need to review it to ensure that it provides sufficient protection to all animals.

My officials are currently finalising a paper which will advise me of the comments received during the 2006 consultation exercise on animal welfare as well as developments in Britain.

I am also due to meet a number of animal welfare groups over the next few weeks. At these meetings, I will discuss both their concerns on current legislation, and importantly what lessons can be learned since new animal welfare legislation came into force in Britain. This will be very helpful in my deliberations and will help ensure that any legislative proposals introduced here will provide the necessary protection for animals.

I also believe that for the draft All Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy to work it is important that animal health and welfare legislation on the island of Ireland is broadly similar. I have therefore asked that the report on the outcome of the 2006 consultation should take cognisance of proposals for new animal welfare legislation currently being considered in the South.

Movement of Circuses

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, for each of the last 10 years, the number of animals imported into Northern Ireland for the use of circuses, including details of (i) their species; (ii) their country of origin; and (iii) the circuses to which they were attached. (AQW 6660/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department does not hold the full remit of information requested as, prior to the introduction of the Circus Regulation in January 2007, the movement of circuses throughout the EU was not recorded on the EU wide Traces system. The Traces system retains movement records for a three month period, no movement of circuses to here has been recorded in that time. Officials are in discussion with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries in the South on how such movements should be notified on the island of Ireland and thus this answer does not reflect those which transit to the South and go on to tour the island.

Animal Welfare Legislation

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the discussions she has

had with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland on animal welfare issues. (AQW 6662/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I believe that it is important that animal welfare legislation on the island of Ireland is broadly similar as this is a crucial component of the Draft All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. I raised the need to share proposals for new animal welfare legislation with Mary Coughlan TD when we met under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council in November 2007.

I raised the issue again at the North South Ministerial Council Sectoral meeting in Enniskillen on 30 April. It was also discussed briefly at a subsequent bi-lateral meeting with Minister Coughlan, when it was agreed that officials would continue to liaise on the South's proposals for new Diseases of Animals/Welfare of Animals primary legislation.

Funds surrendered in the EU Agrienvironment budget

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the EU funding surrendered by her Department in each of the last 2 financial years. (AQW 6666/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In the 2007/08 financial year £414,000 was surrendered in the EU Agri- Environment budget (ESA and Countryside management Schemes, EU Element). This was due to lower than expected claims in the 2007-08 year.

Business Class Flights

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of times she has flown business class in her capacity as Minister since assuming office in May 2007; and (ii) the cost incurred by her Department for this travel, and to confirm if flying business class is standard practice or whether she is given the option of flying business class. (AQW 6775/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have flown business class on one occasion since assuming office in May 2007. On this occasion there were no seats available on the British Midlands flight in the economy section so in order to catch the later flight to Washington there was no option but to take the Business class seat. The cost for this was £310 (including tax) and I can confirm that flying business class is not standard practice, nor do my officials provide the option of flying business class when other seating options are available.

Water Levels in Clea Lakes

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) the position on the handover of rights for the sluice gates at Clay Loughs, Shrigley, Killyleagh between the private company and the Rivers Agency; (ii) to explain the delay; (iii) provide a completion date; and (iv) when the Rivers Agency will begin controlling the levels of the lake. (AQW 6965/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Rivers Agency has recently received a verbal report from the current controllers of the water levels in Clea Lakes that the proposal to transfer water rights and control to the Agency may be withdrawn for commercial reasons. The Agency will seek formal confirmation of the position being taken by the current controllers.

Rivers Agency has no powers to force the transfer.

Farm Nutrient Management Scheme

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to extend the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme beyond 31 December 2008 to enable farmers to complete the works. (AQO 3424/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The decision to extend the scheme is not within my gift. It is an issue of EU State Aid approval and the EU rules are very restrictive because the issue is linked to compliance with the Nitrates Directive.

My Department had already secured a two year extension of the scheme from November 2006 and that was very difficult to negotiate. In order to secure the existing extension to December 2008, the Department had to give a written undertaking to the European Commission that it did not intend to seek any further extension of the scheme.

EU State Aid Rules do not allow the current scheme to continue beyond 31 December 2008.

I have raised the matter with Commissioner Fischer Boel who reminded me about these constraints. Nonetheless, I will do my utmost to enable all approved work to be completed with grant support, and I will be making a formal submission to the Commissioner about this.

Organic and Free Range Products

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the new measures she plans to introduce to regulate the marketing of organic

and free range products to ensure they are accurately labelled. (AQO 3372/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Detailed standards for producing organic food and for controlling those who produce it are set out in EU law which is the basis for the Organic Products Regulations 2004 (as amended) and the Compendium of UK Organic Standards. Amongst other provisions, these Regulations give trading standards officers powers to enforce the labelling requirements. Standards are regularly updated and a comprehensive revision will be introduced at the beginning of 2009.

The UK-wide Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS) advises the four Agriculture Departments on organic standards and on the approval of organic certification bodies. We have two members from the North of Ireland on that group.

Organic standards are enforced by a number of private sector certification bodies who carry out inspections on the farmers, growers, processors and importers that they licence - including, increasingly, unannounced inspections. Certification bodies are in turn subject to annual inspection. Also, DARD carries out a small selection of re-inspections on behalf of ACOS to ensure standards.

The new Eggs and Chicks Regulations have introduced improved controls on the labelling of eggs, including the method of production, and enhanced record keeping requirements. My Department's Egg Marketing Inspectorate has responsibility for inspection and enforcement of the Regulations. They also have legal authority in relation to labelling arrangements in retail and catering establishments where eggs can be tested to indicate the method of production.

There is already in place legislation in relation to food safety, food labelling and trading standards. The EU will shortly introduce new poultrymeat marketing regulations. We will, of course, implement this legislation locally.

Childcare in Rural Areas

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of childcare provision in rural areas; and the action she is taking to improve accessibility to high-quality childcare in rural areas. (AQO 3404/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Mr Speaker, with your permission I will group questions 6, and 7 together

In July 2007 I established a rural childcare stakeholder group, to research and discuss the difficulties associated with childcare in all rural areas,

including West Tyrone, and suggest potential solutions to identified problems.

The group's final report outlines the specific challenges facing rural areas, such as transport / access to existing facilities, affordability of childcare and current providers ability to access further training courses.

The report details the current level of rural childcare provision in rural areas, suggesting that with the exception of childminders there is not an acute lack of rural childcare provision. Childcare providers such as crèches, playgroups and afterschool clubs are operational in rural areas, however the report highlights many of the difficulties, such as accessibility and affordability, rural families face in being able to utilise the services.

The most significant recommendation in the report is that we do not need to develop a separate Rural Childcare Strategy but instead should , work in partnership with others, to establish a rural childcare funding programme with the aim of addressing rural specific need and circumstance.

Other recommendations for my department include a need to develop and resource rural evidence gathering, to enable future trends and comparisons to be made on rural circumstances, develop a Rural White Paper and ensure adequate and monitored rural proofing of government policies. These issues will be addressed in the work which we will be doing to develop proposals for a Rural White Paper and the Rural Champion role as set out in the Programme for Government and agreed recently by the Executive.

It is my intention to implement the report's key recommendation for DARD and establish a rural childcare programme as part of my department's anti-poverty / social inclusion work. We will be work with the group to identify what might be in this programme and how it fits with the work that other Departments do in this area.

I should also point out that funding opportunities for children and young people, including rural childcare, are already an important part of DARD's new rural development programme. It is expected that at least 5%, amounting to approximately £5million, of the total axis 3 funding, will be devoted to projects focussed on addressing the needs of children and young people with awards decided by the relevant Local Action Groups.

Finally, rural childcare is not just an issue for my department and because the report raised a number of issues involving other departments; for example planning and diversification (DOE), rural broadband (DETI), school transport and extended schools (DE, DRD), I shared the report with other departments via the Ministerial Sub-committee on Children and Young People in March.

The reaction from my ministerial colleagues to the report has been very positive. The views received so far have welcomed the report and endorsed the need for joined up working to address the particular challenges that face rural areas. By adopting this joined-up approach we will be able to compliment each others actions, avoid duplication of effort and deliver real benefits to rural childcare providers and parents.

Rural Post Offices

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to offset the proposed closure of many rural post offices. (AQO 3419/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Although Post Offices are not a devolved matter, I share the concerns expressed by many MLAs, and by my Executive colleagues, about the impact the proposed closure of post offices will have on communities. My particular concern is of course the potential impact on rural communities.

Since the recent announcement on the proposed closures I have met with Postwatch NI, the consumer watchdog, who has been monitoring this process. My officials have also met with rural stakeholders who have been collating the concerns of rural communities.

I had met with Post Office Ltd last year to present my concerns, and I met them again just last week. At that meeting I raised issues such as the dismay at the short consultation period; the impact of which will be that those "hard to reach" or vulnerable members of society, who are most likely to be affected by these changes, will not have had an opportunity to voice their concerns. I also raised issues surrounding the level of engagement with local communities, the level of research carried out to ascertain the social impact on the more vulnerable sections of society and the sustainability of the proposed outreach services. I will also be looking closely at the outcome of the planned six month review of the changes and they have impacted on rural communities.

Potato Industry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any special promotions she is undertaking in relation to the potato industry given that the United Nations has designated 2008 as the international year of the potato. (AQO 3430/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I fully support the "International Year of the Potato" programme, which is aimed at focusing global

attention on the key role of the potato, and agriculture in general, in fighting hunger and poverty, contributing to a sustainable development and safeguarding the natural environment. This autumn, DARD plans to host a special Potato event to celebrate the International Year of the Potato. The event will demonstrate the contribution that DARD initiatives and services make to the potato industry and the benefits that positive partnerships between DARD and our local potato industry bring to Agriculture in the North.

In addition, there are a number of ongoing initiatives being undertaken in partnership with the potato industry. The “Chip Initiative” has an overall aim of maximising the use of locally grown potato varieties in the fresh chip market and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) provides assistance to the potato sector through a variety of programmes. These include: training courses for growers, such as “the Potato Challenge”; benchmarking for potato businesses; and the Knowledge and Technology Transfer programme, which encourages growers here to adopt innovative practices. These programmes are promoted through training events and open days. AFBI also, supports the potato sector through breeding and independent evaluation of new varieties, and monitoring of diseases and pests.

DARD continues to engage with industry representatives and is happy to assist in whatever way possible to promote the industry.

Bluetongue

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has sought derogation from the European Union in relation to the burial of farm animals if flocks or herds are required to be put down due to Bluetongue disease. (AQO 3392/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I must explain that the management of Bluetongue disease is very different from diseases such as Foot and Mouth, which require slaughter and disposal of carcasses. Mass culling will not be introduced for Bluetongue.

If we discovered an imported animal with Bluetongue we may cull it, and any associated high risk animals. This is consistent with the action we took in the North Antrim case, where animals imported from Holland were subsequently discovered to have Bluetongue infection.

However, once we confirm that disease is circulating between animals and the midge vector population we will no longer cull animals as a method of disease control. In England in 2007, only 5 animals were culled before that position was reached.

As there will not be any mass culling of animals for Bluetongue disease the derogation from the burial ban, which has been adopted here through the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003, will not be required.

Agrienvironment Programme

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide details on the new agri-environment programme in the Rural Development Plan; and to confirm when this programme will commence. (AQO 3417/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am pleased to confirm that considerable progress has been made with the development of the new agrienvironment programme.

This significant programme is important for the environment in terms of delivering for biodiversity, water quality, landscape and heritage. It will be delivered through the new and improved Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) and the Organic Farming Scheme.

Legislation for both schemes has been passed through the ARD Committee. My Department is working hard to finalise the details of the schemes and the respective application processes and delivery mechanisms.

I am delighted to tell you that I will be hosting an event in June, at which I will be celebrating 20 years of agri-environment schemes - making a difference to our countryside. Agri-environment Schemes are the way forward for integrating farming with responsible management of the countryside.

At this event I will announce the opening dates and provide more details about the new schemes. Following this event, the schemes will be widely promoted and interested farmers and landowners will be able to find out more about when and how to apply.

Forestry Strategy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give an assurance that the acreage of trees currently being planted is on course to meet long-term plans for forestation over the next 25 years. (AQO 3354/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Forestry Strategy sets out a long term aim of doubling the area of forest, from 6% to 12%, by 2050. This will be achieved primarily through afforestation of privately owned agricultural land supported by funds made available under the Rural Development Plan.

The Forestry Strategy recognised that landowners commitment to farming means that forests are likely to expand slowly at first. However, as the impact of Common Agricultural Policy reform grows and the benefits of woodland become more apparent, we expect to see the demand for growing trees to increase.

Targets for creating new woodland were published in the Programme for Government. They take account of a slow initial expansion of woodland and aim to create an additional 550 ha of woodland each year over the next three years. Subsequently, our targets will need to increase to achieve our long term aim.

Fallen Stock Carcasses

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has placed a ban on fallen animals being delivered to the kennels of local harriers and hunts. (AQO 3394/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No. Carcasses of eligible fallen stock may continue to be delivered to recognised kennels and packs of hounds to be used for feeding to dogs. Such premises must be authorised under the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003, and are subject to regular inspections by my Department to ensure that any risks to public and animal health are minimised.

Tourism in Forest Parks

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consultation she has had with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the development of eco-tourist attractions in forest parks. (AQO 3385/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Although I have not met the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment about this issue, my Forest Service officials have met the Norths Tourist Board and other Agencies, to discuss tourism issues and specifically, the Mourne Signature Projects.

The Signature Projects play a central role in meeting the targets for future growth in tourism and the strategic priorities identified for the Mourne Project recognize that forest parks can play a key role in attracting more visitors. Forest Service officials were involved in the development of the Mourne Signature Project Action Plan 2008-2013, which identifies a range of activities, including those which can be catered for in forest parks.

Bluetongue

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the

heightened risk of Bluetongue disease facing the farming industry in the summer. (AQO 3381/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There are two ways by which Bluetongue could be introduced here. The first is from imported animals that have been infected with Bluetongue prior to importation. The second is by windborne spread of infected midges.

The biggest immediate threat to our herds and flocks is from imported infected cattle and sheep.

However, the risk of the spread of Bluetongue increases with the warmer weather and increased midge activity, as midges are the vectors that spread the disease.

I have been successful in lobbying the European Commission to have Bluetongue movement controls strengthened. All of the controls available to us have now been put in place. These include a derogation, which we have secured, to allow us to prevent the import of animals over 90 days old, unless they meet very strict conditions.

As a result I believe that the threat of bluetongue incursion via imported infected animals has been reduced. But farmers need to act responsibly and not bring in animals that may have been exposed to the disease.

Balmoral Show

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to promote the Balmoral Show, as a showcase for the farming industry, on an international stage. (AQO 3388/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Whilst responsibility for promotion of the Balmoral Show primarily rests with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS), the Department is taking a range of steps to promote Balmoral Show 2008. These include promotion of the Department's role with co-ordinating the Government Departments' exhibition - which extends to some 1000 square meters and involves eight departments, with staging a large exhibit within this exhibition and with hosting the Department's Breakfast event.

Pre-event publicity for the Department's exhibit has involved the issue of three Press Releases, which were provided to a range of publications targeting the agri-food sector in addition to the wider media. The Department has also placed an advertisement within the programme for Balmoral Show 2008.

During the Balmoral Show 2008 I will be hosting the Department's Breakfast event, which will be

attended by a large number of agri-food industry and rural community stakeholders both from the North and South of Ireland. Post-event publicity will be provided through a Press Release and my participation in several media interviews.

For the second year in a row, my Department is providing financial assistance under the Regional Food Programme for the Food Pavilion. This will provide an opportunity to showcase the importance of the food industry to the local economy.

In addition, my tours of the Bamoral Showgrounds will provide a wide range of photocall and other opportunities for promotion which will be used for post-event publicity.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Sale of Department Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the land sold by his department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6245/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poets): No land has been sold in the North Down constituency by my core Department since 2002.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund. (AQW 6598/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: An interim evaluation of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund was undertaken by external consultants in 2007. Results found that the Fund was, in general, meeting its agreed targets. A number of targets were found to be either not measurable, or were difficult to meet, and these will be revised for the 2008/09 funding year.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how the Irish Language Broadcast Fund has contributed to the creative industries sector. (AQW 6599/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: While the targets for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund are not specifically linked to Creative Industries targets, an interim evaluation has indicated that the Fund has contributed in a number of ways by: increasing the volume of productions by the independent sector; job

creation in the sector; improvements to the skills base locally through training and development; and driving up the levels of investment by the independent production sector in Northern Ireland.

Irish Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the arrangements that are in place to facilitate people who wish to deal with Departments in the Irish language. (AQW 6600/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In 2005 the Secretary of State agreed Guidance to help public servants meet their obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This includes details on how to facilitate people who wish to deal with Departments in the Irish Language through written correspondence, face-to-face interviews and meetings, and telephone calls. The guidance is available at http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/languages/charter_guidance_2.htm.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the representations that have been made by his Department to the Department of Culture, Media and Sports, in relation to the extension of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund; and to report on the progress made. (AQW 6601/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My officials have written to the lead responsible official in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport outlining the Department's position and following the outcome of their discussions I will decide how to intervene most effectively.

Support for Irish Language and GAA Organisations

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to establish a liaison group to identify current and potential sources of public sector support for the Irish language and GAA organisations, following the establishment of such a group to support the Loyal Orders. (AQW 6649/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure already has well established mechanisms for liaising with language and sporting organisations. There are therefore no plans to establish a liaison group specifically to identify sources of public sector support for Irish Language and GAA organisations.

Re-Imaging Communities Programme

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the organisations and programmes funded through the Re-imaging communities programme to date; and (ii) the amount of funding granted in each case. (AQW 6650/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The organisations and programmes funded through Re-Imaging Communities from 2006/07 to 2008/09 are as follows:

2006/07

Name	Project Title	Grant £
Derry City Council	Art & Re-Imaging Feasibility Study	18,300
Greater Shankill Community Council	Proposed Community Garden at Blackmountain Grove	30,890
Mosside Development Group	Mosside Image Project	59,005
Craigavon Borough Council	Re-imaging Craigavon Communities	43,588
Belfast City Council	Arts Based Feasibility Study	22,978
Newry & Mourne District Council	Days at the North Street Flats	49,820
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Now and Then	11,975
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Hope	13,620
Broughshane and District Community Association Ltd	Banner Project	9,077
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Streetscapes	18,100
Broughshane and District Community Association Ltd	Butterfly Garden Project	22,690
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Reflect, Roden Street Community Garden	14,200
Monkstown Youth for Christ	Monkstown Mural Project	6,280
Lisburn City Council	Needs Analysis, Study & 3 yr Action Plan	14,580
Harryville Partnership Initiative	The Braidwater Spinning Mill Project	15,000
Ballymagroarty Hazelbank Community Partnership	'Creativity in regenerating Crevagh'	5,900
Armagh City & District Council	Armaghhart	12,780

Name	Project Title	Grant £
Ballyhornan and District Community Association	Kate's Green Environmental Improvement Project	15,000
Ards Borough Council	Portavogie Mural Redefinition	11,840
Dunclug Partnership	To engage a facilitator / artist to establish a suitable scheme for the area	5,500
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	Re-imaging Feasibility Study	10,931
Moyle District Council	Small Grants Programme	9,180
Lincoln Courts Youth and Community Association	Community Garden Project	14,650
An Nasc	An Leithor	5,000
Crumlin Together	Creation of Shared Space in Crumlin	9,500
Inter Estate Partnership Antrim	Re-Imaging of Ballycraigay Housing Estate	9,910
Darkley & District Community Association	Re-Imaging Darkley	9,800
Amber Community Development Agency	Roden Street Playground Regeneration	6,063

2007/08

Name	Project Title	Grant
Glentoran Recreation Company Limited	The Oval Childrens Mural Project	27,600
Ballyduff Community House	Bright Sparks	25,840
Riverview Residents Association	Riverview Park Regeneration	49,900
An Nasc	An Ceiliuradh/ Celebration	50,000
Tudor Renewal Area Residents' Association	Crumlin Road Gable Ends	54,315
Clooney Estate Residents Association	Flocking Through Our Streets	44,500
Shankill Womens Centre	Outside Play Area	49,999
Manor Street/Cliftonville Community Group	Re-imaging Lower Cliftonville	50,000
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	Eastway Roundabout, Creggan	46,500
Creggan Enterprises Limited (Derry City Council)	Eastway Wall Art Project	48,400
Cathedral Youth Club (Derry City Council)	Pathway of Life	44,850

Name	Project Title	Grant
CAW 2000 (Derry City Council)	Our Space	33,335
Magherafelt District Council	Mural on Swatragh Wall	18,266
Belfast City Council	Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group - Reflective Space	16,000
Belfast City Council	Lower Shankill Road - Muck Hills Project	11,000
Belfast City Council	Short Strand - Bryson Street Peace Wall Project	17,000
Belfast City Council	Glenbryn Mural Project	4,000
Belfast City Council	Village Focus Group - Lamp Project	40,500
Belfast City Council	Project Management of City Wide Re-imaging Initiatives	37,000
Ards Borough Council	Dicksonia Drive	12,890
Ards Borough Council	Glenburn Road / Ilex Drive	12,700
Ards Borough Council	East End - Queen Square	11,900
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	Coalisland Town Centre	22,550
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	Clogher Valley Sculpture	37,900
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	Renaming Ballygawley Road Estate	13,000
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	O'Neill Park, Lisnahull	7,864
Armagh City & District Council	Armagh Rural Villages: Under the Juniper Tree	42,150
Armagh City & District Council	Dalton Entrance Project 'Remembering Play'	15,250
Armagh City & District Council	Renewal of Community Mural at Orangefield Estate: Our Space	11,150
Upper Springfield Development Company Ltd	Base Alley Mural Project	8,950
Belfast City Council	An Droichead - Ormeau Road Bridge Project	6,000
Belfast City Council	Benview Community Centre - Re-imaging Ballysillan	22,500
Belfast City Council	Donegal Pass Community Centre - Poppy Project	4,700
Belfast City Council	Inner East Belfast - Mural Redefinition Project	28,325
Belfast City Council	Inverary Community Centre - Open Space Project	11,000

Name	Project Title	Grant
Larne Borough Council	Feasibility Study for Larne Borough	11,700
Kells and Connor Improvement Association	Public Art Sculpture at Station Road	15,000
Bovalley Community Association	The White House	7,447
Roe Valley Community Education Forum	Roe Valley Past and Present	7,710
Newtownabbey Borough Council	Re-imaging Communities Feasibility Study	11,500
North Down Local Strategy Partnership	Re-imaging Kilcooley	10,639
St. Luke's Family Centre	Cara House Community Smile Project	12,901
Hillhall Regeneration Group	Hillhall Community Garden	14,493
Long Tower Youth and Community Centre	Brandywell Sporting Legends	11,000
Arellian Nursery School	Raising positive relations towards multi-cultural diversity in the school and the local community	4,570
Bellaghy Community Group	Bellaghy Wall Mural	8,390
East Belfast Community, Historical and Cultural Association	P.I.T.T. (Paintings Illustrating the Transition)	5,267
An Munia Tober	Childrens Art project	7,010
Scrabo Residents Association	Mural Re-definition and creation of Garden of Reflection	12,482
Cloughey and District Community Association	Looking To The Future	3,950
Chinese Welfare Association	Exploring Cultures	5,550
Rathcoole Residents Association	Altered Images; 'Rathcoole past and present'	8,910
West Bank Initiative	Feasibility Consultation Workshops	6,623

2008/09

Name	Project Title	Grant
Markets Development Association	A Celebration of Life in the Markets	14,381
Monkstown Boxing and Community Sports Facility and Holy Trinity Boxing Club	Citizenship Through Sport Project	18,600
Ardoyne Association	Changing Ardoyne	30,520

Name	Project Title	Grant
Belfast City Council	Re-imaging of Lower Shankill	56,475
Belfast City Council	Conway Mill & The Emerald City	15,000
Craigavon Borough Council	Community Based Shared Future Projects	50,000
Craigavon Borough Council	Re-imaging in Brownlow, Portadown & Lurgan	95,250
Banbridge District Council	Creative Community Consultation	8,900
R.E.A.C.H.	R.E.A.C.H. Imaging Subway	3,859
Randalstown Cultural Awareness Association	Neillsbrook Reimaging Project	14,850

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of money spent by his Department on publicity and advertising in 2007-08.

(AQW 6654/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The information requested is set out below.

	2007/08
DCAL	£114,522.14
PRONI	£17,841.18
OSNI	£29,571.89

Museums Council

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps the Museums Council is taking to arrange exhibitions with local councils.

(AQW 6926/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Museums Council provides assistance to local councils regarding exhibitions at their museums.

This has included advice and funding to local museums in the preparation and touring of exhibitions. The Council has also facilitated both local and national touring exhibitions which have visited local museums. They have also identified areas for the development of further touring exhibitions, the streamlining of loans arrangements between museums and in developing the knowledge base on museums collections.

EDUCATION

Community Relations Core Funding Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4509/08, to detail the amount of funding each of the 26 voluntary organisations receive through the Community Relations Core Funding Scheme.

(AQW 5036/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Tá sonraí thíos faoin mhaoiniú a gheobhaidh gach eagraíocht deonach tríd an Scéim Chaidrimh Phobail do Bhunmhaoiniú i 2008-09:

The funding each voluntary organisation will receive through the Community Relations Core Funding Scheme in 2008-09 is detailed in the following table:

Belfast YMCA	£46,405
Bytes Project (The)	£25,560
Childrens Project	£70,942
Community Relations in Schools	£135,914
Co-operation Ireland	£33,857
Corrymeela	£52,648
Creggan Education & Research Services	£36,454
Forthspring Inter-Community Group	£23,300
Harmony Community Trust	£59,209
Kilcranny House	£18,924
National Trust	£33,042
Nerve Centre (The)	£11,612
Childrens Enterprise	£26,321
Childrens Holidays Scheme	£52,505
Council for Integrated Education	£39,673
NIPPA - Early Years Organisation	£64,273
NUS/USI (National Union of Students)	£26,879
Panarts	£37,238
Public Achievement	£32,114
REACT	£27,487
School of Education (University of Ulster)	£28,558
Spirit Of Enniskillen Trust	£117,221
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	£46,570
Verbal Arts Centre (NI) Ltd.	£74,796
Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust	£57,371
Youth Link	£69,702

Grand Total	£1,248,575
-------------	------------

Selection of New Committee Members

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the five chairmen and committees that she set up earlier this month, to detail (i) how these persons were selected; (ii) if the posts were advertised; (iii) how committee staff will be paid; (iv) under what legislation these committees are being established; and (v) if the bodies to be represented by these committees were consulted. (AQW 5173/08)

The Minister of Education: Níor roghnaigh mé cúigear cathaoirleach mar a thugann an cheist sin le tuisceint. Roghnaigh mé an banchathaoirleach agus an leasathaoirleach fireann den ghrúpa lárnach agus an cúigear cathaoirleach de na grúpaí áitiúla ina bhfuil 2 bhan agus 3 fear, de bharr an méid atá déanta acu dár bpobal agus do chúrsaí oideachais.

I have not selected 5 chairmen as the question implies. I have selected the female chairperson and male vice-chair of the central group and the five chairpersons of the local groups consisting of 2 women and 3 men on the basis of their contribution to our community and to education. As these appointments are not public appointments but persons selected to carry out a time-bounded task, there was

no requirement to advertise the posts. Support for the groups will be provided by Department of Education staff and staff from education sector bodies. These roles were not established under any specific legislation, but the process will recognise the statutory duties of the education and library boards in relation to school planning as set out in Article 6 of the Education Order 1986 and the role of the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools under Article 142 of the Education Reform Order 1989, as well as the particular issues around ownership of schools. The agenda for area-based planning was established by the Independent Strategic Review of Education. Stakeholder organisations were advised before I made my announcement on 4 March 2007 and I have written to them to seek nominees to participate on the central and local groups.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools that have more than 30% of classrooms provided by mobile classrooms; and of these schools, to further detail (i) the schools that are scheduled for replacement with permanent buildings; and (ii) the schools that have not yet been approved for a permanent building. [R] (AQW 5519/08)

The Minister of Education: An exercise is currently underway to complete asset management surveys of all schools. A total of 981 schools have been surveyed to date and the remainder will be complete in the coming months. Of this total 150 schools have at least 30% of their accommodation in temporary classrooms.

Leithdháileadh maoiniú caipitil le foirgnimh bhuana a chur in áit cóiríochta i 15 de na scoileanna ar an liosta thíos:

Capital funds have been allocated to replace accommodation with permanent buildings in 15 of the schools listed below:

- Colaiste Feirste, Belfast
- Dean Maguire College, Omagh
- Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
- Coranny Primary School, Roslea
- Cornagogue Primary School, Roslea
- Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert
- St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff
- Dromore Central Primary School, Dromore
- Dromintee Primary School, Newry
- St Joseph's Primary School, Madden
- St Joseph's Primary School, Newry
- Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint
- St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone
- St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan
- Edendork Primary School, Dungannon

Mobile classrooms can prove useful for schools, eg where a school is expanding or needs to change capacity in the short term or where a decant is required pending work on a replacement building. Schools with mobiles do not necessarily require a new permanent building. The circumstances of each school need to be examined on their merits.

Special Needs Education Expenditure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the total amount spent on special needs education in each of the five Education and Library Boards in each of the last five years. (AQW 5675/08)

The Minister of Education: Léiríonn an tábla thíos an méid maoinithe, a thuairiscigh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLí) ina dtuarascálacha ar chaiteachas faibhrithe don Roinn Oideachais, a leithdháileadh ar oideachas riachtanas speisialta i dTuaisceart na hÉireann i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana seo caite.

The table below shows how much funding has been reported by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs)

in their accrued expenditure reports to the Department of Education as having been allocated to special needs education in the North of Ireland in each of the last five years. The response provided is rounded to the nearest million.

	BELB £	NEELB £	SEELB £	SELB £	WELB £	Total £
2002/2003	21m	18m	27m	19m	18m	103m
2003/2004	26m	21m	32m	22m	23m	124m
2004/2005	28m	22m	31m	25m	27m	133m
2005/2006	27m	27m	35m	26m	27m	142m
2006/2007	29m	26m	32m	28m	26m	141m

Over the same five year period additional funding of approximately £21m has been allocated by the Department of Education to support statemented pupils in the voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated sectors.

Recycling in Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the measures in place to encourage schools to recycle waste materials. (AQW 5742/08)

The Minister of Education: A school waste recycling scheme was established in 2004/05 in partnership between the Education & Library Boards (ELBs), DOE Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and the local District Councils.

The scheme includes for the recycling of

- Office paper
- Cardboard
- Cans
- Plastic bottles

Local Councils have their own Environmental Officers who during school visits encourage and advise pupils how to use the recycling facilities to the greatest advantage. Belfast City Council provides free bins for school recycling.

The ELBs also work in partnership with the charity Bryson House Recycling to promote the recycling message. The BELB has a contract in place specifically for the collection of recyclable waste, and all schools are encouraged to make use of this.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which is now a statutory element of the revised curriculum, identifies waste management and recycling schemes managed by pupils as a good practice indicator as part of ESD Quality Assurance checklist.

Cuireann Oifigigh Fuinnimh & Thimpeallachta comhairle agus tacaíocht bhreise ar fáil nuair a iarrtar orthu amhlaidh a dhéanamh.

Further advice and support is provided by Board Energy & Environment Officers when requested.

Schools Building Programme

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the guidelines she has issued on the use of (i) insulation standards; and (ii) microgeneration technologies, in (a) new; and (b) refurbished school buildings, under the new Schools Building Programme. (AQW 5887/08)

The Minister of Education: My Department has not issued guidance specifically on insulation standards or microgeneration technologies in relation to new build or refurbished schools. The education authorities are aware that all new and refurbished school buildings must conform to the current Building Regulations (NI) 2006 which determine construction standards. The Department has also advised school authorities who have capital schemes in planning of the requirements relating to Achieving Sustainability in Construction Procurement – Sustainability Action Plan which covers sustainable development in construction projects.

Breithnítear moltaí d'úsáid teicneolaíochtaí micrighiniúna ar bhonn luach ar airgead nuair a chuimsítear i ndearaí scoile iad.

Proposals for use of microgeneration technologies are considered on a value for money basis when included in school designs.

Millisle Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to give a timescale within which the (i) external works; and (ii) replacement of windows, will take place at Millisle Primary school. (AQW 6066/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé de rún ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt go gcríochnófar na hoibreacha seachtracha agus go gcuirfear isteach na fuinneoga úra ag Bunscoil Millisle le linn na bliana airgeadais reatha.

The South Eastern Education and Library board intend that the external works and the replacement of windows at Millisle Primary school will be completed in the current financial year.

Sure Start Programme

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the funding awarded to each Sure Start programme. (AQW 6068/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sonraí maidir le gach Surestart le linn na dtrí bliana airgeadais seo caite le fáil sa tábla thíos:

Details of funding for each Surestart over the last 3 financial years are contained in the table below;

Project	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Clogher Valley	£288,962	£297,631	£444,613
Orana	£476,021	£490,302	£622,682
Close to Home	£300,937	£309,965	£487,929
South Armagh	£318,949	£328,517	£535,880
Blossom	£338,094	£348,237	£489,704
Keady/ Callanbridge	£0	£0	£100,000
Splash	£0	£0	£538,887
Little Hands	£291,017	£297,631	£521,742
Shantallow	£344,558	£432,825	£490,387
Dungiven	£299,615	£487,097	£452,158
Strabane	£387,485	£443,028	£653,312
Last, Omagh	£297,697	£582,609	£498,617
Cherish Irvinestown	£292,552	£475,109	£614,490
West Bank, Derry	£0	£473,193	£441,159
East Bank, Derry	£0	£57,886	£341,298
West Tyrone	£0	£57,886	£327,509
Ballymena South	£193,320	£57,886	£643,834
Coleraine	£320,693	£459,948	£527,305
Dalriada	£193,899	£577,078	£476,913
Gold	£228,090	£419,602	£521,182
Horizon	£0	£433,526	£439,750
Newtownabbey	£222,990	£125,000	£554,796
SMILE	£301,208	£379,472	£423,982
Glenbrook	£109,153	£349,254	£395,168
Shankill	£410,097	£490,651	£522,540
Clan Mor	£382,242	£461,651	£438,926
Downpatrick	£446,355	£588,972	£522,689
LAP	£244,679	£338,144	£457,789

Project	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Colin Neighbourhood	£519,221	£554,435	£573,307
East Belfast	£387,876	£552,900	£580,302
South Belfast	£532,541	£577,502	£605,608
Outer West	£0	£85,000	£170,229
Upper Springfield	£0	£250,397	£255,118
Beechmount	£0	£0	£119,636

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail any land sold by her department in the North Down constituency since 2002. (AQW 6120/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó 2002, díoladh cúig mhaoin i dtoghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin; ba le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt an t-iomlán acu lá den saol. Seo a leanas na sonraí:

Since 2002, there have been five properties sold in the North Down constituency; all formerly owned by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board. The details are as follows:

2001/02	Premises at 1A Dufferin Avenue, Bangor
2002/03	Land at Whinney Hill, Holywood
2003/04	Former premises of Clifton Special School, Bangor, reverted to Health Trust
2006/07	Land in front of Bloomfield Road PS transferred to DRD to provide a lay-by

Land at Castle Campus leased to North Down & Ards Institute

Interactive Whiteboards

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the cost of providing interactive whiteboards to schools; and (ii) the cost as a percentage of the department's budget. (AQW 6129/08)

The Minister of Education: There is no budget specifically for the provision of interactive whiteboards in schools.

Schools can decide how to use their budgets and therefore the purchase of interactive whiteboards or other items of equipment is a matter for school authorities. While many schools that have had new builds have chosen to install interactive whiteboards from their allocations for furniture and equipment,

decisions on how they spend their allocation is solely a matter for the individual school authorities.

Ní féidir a fhionnadh, mar sin de, cá mhéad atá á chaitheamh ag scoileanna ar sholáthar clár bán idirghníomhach agus cad é an ceatadán é seo de bhuiséad na Roinne.

It is not possible therefore to determine how much is being spent by schools on the provision of interactive whiteboards and the percentage this is of the Department's budget.

Voltage Power Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail those schools located within 60 metres of high voltage power lines. (AQW 6130/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá líon iomlán de 24 suíomh scoile (Foirgneamh Scoile agus Teorainn) níos lú ná 60 méadar ó líne tarchurtha. Seo a leanas liosta de na scoileanna :-

A total of 24 school sites (School Building and Boundary) are less than 60 metres from a transmission line. The list of schools are as follows:-

Education Board	School Name	Town Area
Belfast	Elmgrove Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	Orangefield Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	St John the Baptist Boys' & Girls' Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	Holy Child Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	St Teresa's Primary School	Belfast
Belfast	Holy Child Nursery School	Belfast
Belfast	Matt Talbot Nursery School	Belfast
Western	Craigbrack Primary School	Derry
Western	Recarson Primary School	Omagh
North Eastern	Ballycarry Primary School	Carrickfergus
North Eastern	Castleroe Primary School	Coleraine
North Eastern	Camphill Primary School	Ballymena
North Eastern	Anahorish Primary School	Antrim
North Eastern	St Macnissi's Primary School	Newtownabbey
North Eastern	Kilcoan Primary School	Larne
North Eastern	Carrickfergus College	Carrickfergus
North Eastern	Ballee Community High School	Ballymena

Education Board	School Name	Town Area
North Eastern	North Coast Integrated College	Coleraine
South Eastern	Belvoir Park Primary School	Belfast
South Eastern	Lead Hill Primary School	Belfast
South Eastern	Ballymacash Primary School	Lisburn
South Eastern	St Ita's Primary School	Belfast
Southern	Gaelscoil Uí Neill	Coalisland

Irish-Medium Schools

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to confirm that all documents sent from her department to Irish Medium schools are written in Irish only.

(AQW 6140/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé mar pholasaí agam go gcuirfí gach ciorclán agus eolas chuig scoileanna i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge.

My policy is that all circulars and information being sent to schools should be sent out in English and Irish.

Education Welfare Officers

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of education welfare officers currently working in Belfast, broken down by parliamentary constituency; and (ii) where they are based.

(AQW 6176/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní ar bhonn na dtoghcheantar parlaiminte a eagraítear Oifigigh Leasa Oideachais. Cuirtear daltaí chuig an tSeirbhís Leasa Oideachais bunaithe ar a seoladh baile agus tá cuid de limistéar Thuaisceart Bhéal Feirste clúdaithe ag baill foirne ó limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt.

Education Welfare Officers are not organised on the basis of parliamentary constituencies. Pupils are referred to the Education Welfare Service based on their home address and part of the North Belfast area is covered by staff from North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) area.

The Boards have provided the following information about staff allocations based on post code areas:

	Based In	Posts Based In Division	Postcode Areas of Schools Supported
Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)	North Division (C/o Cliftonville Primary School), 93 Cliftonville Road, BELFAST BT14 6JQ	Senior Education Welfare Officers and 7 Education Welfare Officers	BT4, BT12, BT13, BT14, BT15, BT36
BELB	West Division (C/o Whiterock Library), 10 Whiterock Road, BELFAST BT12	Senior Education Welfare Officers and 7 Education Welfare Officers	BT11, BT12, BT13, BT36, BT1
BELB	South & East Division (Ulidia Resource Centre), Somerset Street, BELFAST BT7	Senior Education Welfare Officers and 7 Education Welfare Officers	BT4, BT5, BT6, BT7, BT9, BT10, BT11, BT12
North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)	Blythefield Primary School, Education Welfare Project Team	Project Co-ordinator and 4 Education Welfare Officer's	
NEELB	Blythefield Primary School, Education Welfare Project Team	Looked After Children team staffed by 2 Education Welfare Officers.	
NEELB	Loughview Regional Offices, 2-6 Jordantown Road, Newtownabbey, BT37 0QF The total number of Education Welfare Officers working in the North Belfast constituency is 14.	4 Education Welfare Officers	4 schools in BT37

Children and Young People's Funding Package

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail, by individual project, the total funding that was available through the Children and Young People's Fund and the Children's Fund for each of 2006/2007 and 2007/2008; and the ongoing funding that has been allocated for each project during 2008/2009.[R] (AQW 6181/08)

The Minister of Education: The funding available for each of the individual projects under the six themed areas of the Children and Young People's Funding Package was as follows:-

	£m	
	2006/07	2007/08
Extended Schools		
Front Line activity in schools	10.050	9.930
School based Counselling support	0.715	1.800
Creative Learning Centres	0.740	0.500
Centralised Services	1.000	0.950
Extended Early Years provision		
Expansion of Sure Start	1.750	3.000
Programme for 2 year olds	0.750	1.900
Sure Start Day Care	0.650	0.865
Increase enrolment of Traveller children	0.100	0.000
Pre-School Education Expansion Programme	0.442	0.507
Looked-after children / vulnerable young adults		
Supporting and equipping foster carers	1.040	1.040
Supporting staff in residential care settings	0.122	0.300
Refreshing computer equipment in children's homes	0.113	0.000
Supporting young people not ready for independence	0.532	0.750
Empowering children and young people in care	0.660	0.660

	£m	
	2006/07	2007/08
Youth outreach		
Youth Outreach Initiative	0.750	1.025
Peer Educator Youth Workers	0.036	0.000
Child Protection		
Telephone helpline support	0.130	0.170
Support to the Sports Council	0.091	0.065
Support to the Youth sector	0.235	0.235
Rapid response child protection teams	1.057	1.050
Child contact centres	0.000	0.500
Inter-agency/school – Social services collaboration	0.336	0.570
Children with special needs and disabilities		
English as an additional language	0.100	0.075
Multi-disciplinary support teams	4.000	4.000
Transition into adulthood	0.900	0.900
Mental health/ learning disability services – Crisis Response Teams	0.500	1.000
Support in the community for children from Muckamore Abbey Hospital	0.300	0.600
Life Skills Training	0.100	0.100

As the Children and Young People's Funding Package ended in March 2008 each Department involved will have decided, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) process, whether they would provide mainstream or base-line funding for areas previously funded by the Package. If included, this funding will have been allocated and will be monitored in keeping with current finance and audit recommendations.

Tugadh maoiniú, ar fiú £5.8m é, d'eagraíochtaí indibhidiúla ón Chiste do Pháistí sa bhliain airgeadais 2006/07 agus tugadh £5.75m sa bhliain airgeadais 2007/08. Tá acmhainní, ar fiú £5.72m iad, ar fáil d'eagraíochtaí don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09.

The funding allocated to individual organisations under the Children's Fund in the 2006/07 financial year totalled £5.8m and in 2007/08 totalled £5.75m. The resources available to organisations for the 2008/09 financial year total £5.72m.

Youth Workers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of youth workers funded by her department, broken down by parliamentary constituency.
(AQW 6184/08)

The Minister of Education: I láthair na huaire, tugann an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú do na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus Tionscadal Bytes a fhostaíonn oibrithe óige trasna Thuaisceart na hÉireann.

The Department of Education currently provides funding to the five Education and Library Boards and the Bytes Project which employ youth workers across the north of Ireland.

The Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards and the Director of Bytes provided the following information on the number of youth workers deployed in the North of Ireland, in each Parliamentary constituency:

Parliamentary Constituency	Full-time youth worker posts (1)	Part-time youth worker posts	Total youth worker posts
Belfast East	16	66	82
Belfast North	18	65	83
Belfast South	12	46	58
Belfast West	39	145	184
East Antrim	4	106	110
East Derry	3	95	98
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	4.5	85	89.5
Foyle	13	104	117
Lagan Valley	8.4	36	44.4
Mid Ulster	5.6	89	94.6
Newry & Armagh	9.1	53	62.1
North Antrim	4	125	129
North Down	7	34	41
South Antrim	6	86	92
South Down	9.8	76	85.8
Strangford	7	71	78

Parliamentary Constituency	Full-time youth worker posts (1)	Part-time youth worker posts	Total youth worker posts
Upper Bann	12.6	81	93.6
West Tyrone	4	64	68
Total	183	1,427	1,610

1 In some cases where a youth worker works in more than one constituency a pro rata estimate of their work, in each constituency, has been made.

School Uniforms

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the action she is taking to ensure that assistance is given for primary school uniform costs, similar to that which is available for secondary schools.

(AQW 6213/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní ceanglas reachtúil é éide scoile a chaitheamh; ina áit sin, is ceist í atá faoi rogha na scoileanna aonair. Ba chóir do Bhoird Ghobharnóirí an costas a chur san áireamh nuair atá siad ag dearadh a n-éide agus ag leagan síos chód cóirithe.

The wearing of school uniforms is not a statutory requirement; rather it is a matter for the discretion of individual schools. Boards of Governors should take cost considerations into account when designing their uniform and drawing up a dress code.

I have no plans at present to extend to primary schools the uniform grants currently available for pupils in secondary and special schools. Extension of the Clothing Allowances Scheme to primary schools would be expensive in relative terms and I could not justify diverting resources to this area at the present time.

After-School Clubs

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to confirm that her department has responsibility for school age childcare which includes school breakfast clubs and after school clubs.

(AQW 6223/08)

The Minister of Education: Upon transfer of Early Years policy responsibilities to DE in 2006, policy responsibility for home based childcare and private daycare of children aged 0-12 transferred to DE in accordance with the relevant sections of the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Tá an Roinn Oideachais freagrach fosta as soláthar breisithe scoile a chuireann scoileanna deontaschúnta ar fáil agus as soláthar eile ó ógeagraíochtaí reachtúla agus deonacha atá cláraithe leis na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

The Department of Education also has responsibility for extended school provision provided by grant-aided schools and other provision by statutory and voluntary youth organisations registered with the Education and Library Boards.

Violence in Schools

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of instances of violence against staff within schools in 2007 in the (i) primary sector; and (ii) secondary sector.

(AQW 6237/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education does not collect the information requested.

However, statistics on the reasons for suspension and expulsion are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below provides the number of suspensions and expulsions for physical attacks on staff by pupils in the 2006/07 school year.

Statistics in relation to suspensions relate to the number of occasions where pupils were suspended and not the number of pupils suspended.

	Number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on staff	Number of pupils expelled for physical attacks on staff
Primary (Key stage 1 & 2)	70	0
Secondary (Key stage 3 & 4)	196	5

Ní bhaileofar staitisticí comhchosúla do 2007/08 go deireadh na scoilbhliana reatha.

Similar statistics for 2007/08 will not be collected until the end of the current school year.

Numeracy and Literacy Skills

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the discussions she has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to numeracy and literacy skills, to ensure a joined up approach to the problem.

(AQW 6253/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá bunús maith leis na dúshlán atá os ár gcoinne i dtaca le litearthacht agus uimhearthacht de – agus na hiarmhairtí do dhaoine óga i dtéarmaí eisiaimh shóisialta agus deacrachtaí teacht ar bhreiseoidéachas agus ardoideachas agus ar phoist a bhfuil pá maith ag dul leo má fhágann siad

an scoil gan muinín agus gan inniúlacht i léamh, i scríobh agus in úsáid matamaitice

The challenges we face in relation to literacy and numeracy are well documented – and the consequences for young people in terms of social exclusion and difficulties in accessing further and higher education and well paid jobs when they leave school lacking confidence and competence in reading, writing and using mathematics.

My officials are in regular and ongoing contact with their counterparts in the Department for Employment and Learning to discuss areas of common interest, including literacy and numeracy and essential skills. In addition the Department for Employment and Learning has observer status on the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, established in February 2007, to assist my Department not only in developing the Revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy but also in monitoring its implementation. I have also corresponded with the Minister for Employment and Learning on literacy and numeracy/essential skills and this dialogue will continue.

Victoria School, Ballyhalbert

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why Victoria School, Ballyhalbert, did not have desks for 4 days after it reopened on 7 April 2008. (AQW 6254/08)

The Minister of Education: The SEELB has advised that construction of the new building for Victoria P.S. progressed well and was completed ahead of schedule at the beginning of April. As a result of completing ahead of schedule the supplier of the new furniture was three days late in delivering the furniture for the new school building.

De réir mar a thuigim ní raibh aon fhadhbanna móra ag an scoil, nó bhí siad in ann úsáid a bhaint as an troscán a bhí ann sna trí lá gur tháinig an troscán nua.

I understand that this did not cause the school any undue problems as they were able to use the existing furniture for the three days until the new furniture arrived.

School Principal Appointments

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to change the current system for the appointment of school principals to require one nomination rather than the present three nominations. (AQW 6255/08)

The Minister of Education: The process to which you refer is currently carried out by the Teacher

Appointments Committees for controlled schools. I propose to change this process as part of the Review of Public Administration. My intention is that Boards of Governors of controlled schools will be responsible for the selection process. In each case, the Board of Governors will advise the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) of the successful candidate. The ESA will give effect to the decision by issuing the contract of employment. These procedures will be set out in schemes of employment prepared for each school.

Faoi réir chomhaontú an Choiste Fheidhmiúcháin, tá sé mar aidhm agam reachtaíocht a thabhairt isteach a dhíreoidh air sin roimh shos an tsamhraidh.

Subject to Executive agreement, I propose to introduce legislation to this effect before the summer recess.

Irish-Language Officer

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why his department has advertised for the post of staff officer - Irish Language, with the salary range £22,621 - £30,520, to be in position from September 2008. (AQW 6256/08)

The Minister of Education: I have asked my department to appoint a Staff Officer (Irish Language) to provide support in relation to correspondence in Irish and meetings/ visits where Irish is spoken.

Léiríonn an tuarastal a fógraíodh tuarastal an ghráid Oifigeach Foirne.

The advertised salary reflects that of the Staff Officer grade.

Irish-Language Officer

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the source of funding for an Irish language Staff Officer. (AQW 6297/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó bhuiséad riaracháin na Roinne a mhaoineofar post an Oifigigh Foirne (Gaeilge).

The Staff Officer (Irish Language) post will be funded from the Department's administrative budget.

Education Targets

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how she will address the latest figures that show that young male protestants are not meeting educational achievement targets and are well below the average in both rural and urban areas. (AQW 6298/08)

The Minister of Education: The overall aim of my Department is to establish an education system which supports the highest standards of achievement for all. Ensuring that every young person can be supported to fulfil her or his potential, regardless of their background or the area in which they live, is therefore at the core of our work.

At present, far too many pupils are leaving schools with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, leaving them ill-prepared for working life and at risk of social exclusion. I am determined to change this through an ambitious programme of change and reform that will ensure that all young people have equal opportunity to succeed. As well as my proposals to reform post-primary education, we are also taking action to ensure that every school is a good school and to raise achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Beimid ag déanamh comhairliúcháin roimh i bhfad ar straitéis athbheithnithe litearthachta agus uimhríochta a mbeidh sé mar phríomhfhócas aici dul i ngleic le gnóthachtáil íseal oideachais áit ar bith a dtarlaíonn sí.

We will shortly be consulting on a revised literacy and numeracy strategy that has a very specific focus on tackling underachievement wherever it occurs.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why, under the consultation process for the closure of Donaghadee High School, the Commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board sought legal advice. (AQW 6323/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that legal advice was sought to ensure that consultation procedures are correct and that the rights of staff, parents and pupils are not impinged.

Déantar athbheithniú ar bhonn bliantúil ar riachtanais na bpáistí a bhfuil ráitis i dtaobh riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu. Tríd an phróiseas athbheithnithe bhliantúil sin, tá oifigigh an Bhoird ag obair le tuismitheoirí agus roinnt scoileanna sa cheantar chun socrúcháin oideachais chuí a aimsiú do pháistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais orthu.

The needs of statemented children are reviewed annually. Through this annual review process, Board officers are working with parents and several schools in the area on identifying appropriate placements for children with special educational needs.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons why Donaghadee High School has not had a permanent Principal appointed for the last 3 years. (AQW 6324/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of a Principal to Donaghadee High School is a matter for the employing authority, which in this case is the South Eastern and Education Library Board (SEELB). I have been advised by the Board that the Principal resigned on 28 February 2007 and the Vice Principal has been Acting Principal since 1 March 2007.

The SEELB has been considering the future of Donaghadee High School within the context of its strategic review of education in the North East Ards area. A development proposal to transform the school to controlled integrated status was produced with a closing date for comments of 28 April 2008. The SEELB is also consulting on the potential closure of Donaghadee High School and published a development proposal on 29 April 2008.

Dá bharr sin, agus ar mholadh BOLOD, níor thosaigh Bord na nGobharnóirí an próiseas a bhaineann le Príomhoide buan a earcú.

For this reason, and on the recommendation of the SEELB, the Board of Governors has not begun the process of recruiting a permanent Principal.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the impact that the closure of Donaghadee High School will have on the children with special needs who will have to travel to Dundonald High School. (AQW 6325/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that legal advice was sought to ensure that consultation procedures are correct and that the rights of staff, parents and pupils are not impinged.

Déantar athbheithniú ar bhonn bliantúil ar riachtanais na bpáistí a bhfuil ráitis i dtaobh riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu. Tríd an phróiseas athbheithnithe bhliantúil sin, tá oifigigh an Bhoird ag obair le tuismitheoirí agus roinnt scoileanna sa cheantar chun socrúcháin oideachais chuí a aimsiú do pháistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais orthu.

The needs of statemented children are reviewed annually. Through this annual review process, Board officers are working with parents and several schools in the area on identifying appropriate placements for children with special educational needs.

Castle Gardens Primary School

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost that would be incurred by her department in demolishing the former Castle Gardens Primary School Building in Newtownards. (AQW 6351/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has responsibility for the former Castle Gardens Primary School site, and has estimated that the demolition and clearance of the site to ground level would cost in the region of £75,000.

Chuir an Bord in iúl fosta go bhfuil an réadmhaoin á breithniú faoi láthair mar shuíomh féideartha d'athshuíomh Leabharlann Bhaile Nua na hArda agus táthar ag súil, má tá an tionscadal seo le dul ar aghaidh, go gcuimseofaí scartáil agus réiteach láithreáin sa phríomhchonradh don tionscadal sin.

The Board has also advised that the property is currently being considered as a potential site for the relocation of Newtownards Library and it is hoped that if this project were to advance, that demolition and site clearance would be incorporated into the main contract for that project.

School Board of Governors

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to confirm if there is a legal or administrative requirement for Boards of Governors of schools to provide minutes of their meetings to the relevant Education and Library Board; and to detail how soon after the meeting the minutes should be sent to the Board. (AQW 6366/08)

The Minister of Education: Under an administrative requirement contained in their Scheme of Management, schools, other than Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated, are required to send a copy of the minutes of their Board of Governor meetings to the Chief Executive of the relevant Education & Library Board within 14 days following the particular meeting.

Caithfidh Scoileanna Imeachtha Faoi Chothabháil cóipeanna dá gcuid miontuairiscí a thabhairt isteach don Roinn Oideachais.

Grant Maintained Integrated schools, however, are required to submit copies of their minutes to the Department of Education.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if the Commissioners took into consideration (i) merging Donaghadee High school with Donaghadee Primary

school; and (ii) the amount of new housing that is to be built under B Map, before recommending closure of Donaghadee High school. (AQW 6384/08)

The Minister of Education: I am assured by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that all relevant information pertinent to this particular area was considered during the review of provision in the North East Ards area. This included the potential for additional pupils from future housing development.

A potential merger of Donaghadee High School with Donaghadee Primary School was not considered by the Board because of the potential to raise child protection issues due to the age range of pupils involved.

Faoi réir thoradh an phróiseis chomhairliúcháin ar Mholadh Forbartha chun Ardscoil Dhomhnach Daoi (Donaghadee High School) a dhruidim, thug an Bord comhairle don Roinn go n-oibreoidh sé go dlúth leis an scoil agus le tuismitheoirí chun a chinntiú go mbeidh socrúcháin chuí oideachais eile ann do dhaltáí, lena n-áirítear iad siúd a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta acu, sa chás go bhfuil sé indéanta agus fad is go gcloítear le polasaí oscailte clárúcháin.

Subject to the outcome of a consultation on a Development Proposal to close the Donaghadee High School, the Board has advised the Department that it will work closely with the school and parents to ensure appropriate alternative placements for pupils, including those with special needs, where possible and in line with open enrolment policy.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if pupils will be allowed to go to the school of their choice if Donaghadee High school closes. (AQW 6385/08)

The Minister of Education: I am assured by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that all relevant information pertinent to this particular area was considered during the review of provision in the North East Ards area. This included the potential for additional pupils from future housing development.

A potential merger of Donaghadee High School with Donaghadee Primary School was not considered by the Board because of the potential to raise child protection issues due to the age range of pupils involved.

Faoi réir thoradh an phróiseis chomhairliúcháin ar Mholadh Forbartha chun Ardscoil Dhomhnach Daoi (Donaghadee High School) a dhruidim, thug an Bord comhairle don Roinn go n-oibreoidh sé go dlúth leis an scoil agus le tuismitheoirí chun a chinntiú go mbeidh socrúcháin chuí oideachais eile ann do dhaltáí, lena n-áirítear iad siúd a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta

acu, sa chás go bhfuil sé indéanta agus fad is go gcloítear le polasaí oscailte clárúcháin.

Subject to the outcome of a consultation on a Development Proposal to close the Donaghadee High School, the Board has advised the Department that it will work closely with the school and parents to ensure appropriate alternative placements for pupils, including those with special needs, where possible and in line with open enrolment policy.

Grammar School Entrance Exams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of Grammar schools in North Down parliamentary constituency that have indicated they will set their own entrance exams. (AQW 6386/08)

The Minister of Education: De réir tuairiscí sna meáin, léirigh trí scoil ghramádaí i dtoghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin go leagfaidh siad amach a gcuid scrúduithe iontrála féin - Bangor Grammar School, Glenlola Collegiate School agus Sullivan Upper School.

According to press reports, three grammar schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency have indicated that they will set their own entrance examinations – Bangor Grammar School, Glenlola Collegiate School and Sullivan Upper School.

Transferred Redundancies

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department's position on the procedures relating to transfer redundancy between controlled and maintained schools. (AQW 6426/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an fhreagracht ar na húdaráis fostaíochta maidir le poiséas na n-iomarcaíochtaí aistrithe agus é á chur i bhfeidhm acu. Tá mo Roinnse ag tacú fós le hiarrachtaí údarás fostaíochta le cinntiú go ndéantar múinteoirí a athimscar nuair is féidir in ionad iomarcaíocht éigeantach a thabhairt dóibh.

The process for transferred redundancies is the responsibility of, and is operated by, the employing authorities. My Department is supportive of employing authorities' efforts to ensure that teachers are redeployed where possible rather than face compulsory redundancy.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the websites that come under the Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining

them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6443/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní féidir figiúr a chur ar an chostas a bhaineann le gach suíomh a chothabháil mar nach gcoinnítear figiúr imdhealaithe maidir le cothabháil suímh.

It is not possible to provide a figure on the cost of maintaining each site as a disaggregated figure for site maintenance is not held.

Websites that come under the Department of Education's responsibility are:

Website	Number of Visitors since 8 May 2007	Number of Page Views since 8 May 2007
www.deni.gov.uk	369,278	1,949,891
www.etini.gov.uk	38,926	162,736

School Curriculum

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps her Department has taken to introduce new material into the common curriculum to educate children in primary and post-primary schools on the health implications of obesity. (AQW 6459/08)

The Minister of Education: The revised curriculum, which is being phased in from September 2007, aims to better prepare young people for all aspects of life, including their personal health and well-being. It has a new area of Personal Development & Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary.

Through PDMU/LLW, pupils will explore all aspects of their personal health and well-being, including the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, the consequences of poor dietary choices and ways of achieving a healthy diet. Teachers are being provided with training and guidance materials to support the introduction of PDMU/LLW.

In addition, Physical Education remains compulsory for all pupils from Years 1 to 12, where pupils will develop an understanding of the benefits of physical activity for their health. Encouraging young people to take part in physical activity from an early age is a key part of our drive to tackle rising levels of childhood obesity.

Sin an fáth ar thug mé isteach an Clár um Spóirt Curaclaim an scoilbhliain seo agus an aidhm ann forbairt a dhéanamh ar scileanna fisiciúla liteartha na ndaltaí is óige, á spreagadh le bheith páirteach i ngníomhaíochtaí fisiciúla le linn a saoil.

That is why I have this school year introduced in our primary schools the Curriculum Sports Programme,

the aim of which is to develop the physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils, encouraging participation in physical activity throughout their lives.

Suspension of Children

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 3 years, (i) the number of children suspended from (a) grammar schools; and (b) secondary schools; (ii) the length of the suspensions; and (iii) the support services available to reintegrate suspended pupils. (AQW 6461/08)

The Minister of Education: Statistics on pupil suspensions are gathered at the end of each school year from Education and Library Boards.

- (i) The table below provides the number of pupils in (Key Stages 3 and 4) suspended from grammar schools and secondary schools in the 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years.

	Number of pupils suspended from grammar schools	Number of pupils suspended from secondary schools
2004/05	603	4,373
2005/06	669	4,532
2006/07	583	4,062

- (ii) The following table shows the number of occasions pupils were suspended in grammar and secondary schools in 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006/07 by length of suspension.

Length of suspension	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07	
	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary
1 day	206	1,473	253	1,595	247	1,640
2 days	162	1,499	208	1,582	184	1,540
3 days	160	2,007	181	2,175	173	1,895
4 days	27	296	25	267	32	259
5 days	155	1,446	110	1,517	83	1,180
6-10 days	26	190	32	183	16	126
11-15 days	7	73	11	62	4	40
16 days and over	10	113	5	102	11	86

Note:

- Pupils may be suspended more than once, this does not equate to a pupil count
- Figures relate to pupils in key stage 3 and 4.

- (iii) Schools are expected to provide suitable work for completion at home by pupils who have been suspended, to ensure continuity of education so the pupil can re-integrate without difficulty.

Nuair atá tréimse leanúnach fionraí thar 15 lá i bhfeidhm, ba chóir don Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ábhartha cuidiú le soláthar oideachais trí theagasc baile nó trí shocrú éigin eile. Féadann an Bord fosta cruinniú a bheith acu leis an scoil agus le tuismitheoirí dalta leis na roghanna do shocrúithe níos fadtéarmaí a mheas, agus athfhreastal ar an scoil san áireamh.

Where a continuous period of suspension exceeding 15 days is in place, the relevant Education and Library Board is expected to assist with education provision through home tuition or some other arrangement. The Board may also meet with the school and the parents of a pupil to consider the options for longer term arrangements including re-integration.

Interactive Whiteboards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of interactive whiteboards installed in schools. (AQW 6466/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn taifead ar líon na gclár bán idirghníomhach a chuirtear isteach i scoileanna nó ar líon na scoileanna a bhfuil cláir bhána mar sin acu.

The Department does not hold details of the numbers of interactive whiteboards installed in schools or the number of schools with such whiteboards.

Schools have autonomy to decide how to use their budgets and therefore the purchase of interactive whiteboards or other items of equipment is a matter for school authorities. While many schools that have had new builds have chosen to install interactive whiteboards from their furniture and equipment budget, decisions on how they spend their allocation is again solely a matter for the schools.

Interactive Whiteboards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools with interactive whiteboards, broken down by constituency. (AQW 6467/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn taifead ar líon na gclár bán idirghníomhach a chuirtear isteach i scoileanna nó ar líon na scoileanna a bhfuil cláir bhána mar sin acu.

The Department does not hold details of the numbers of interactive whiteboards installed in schools or the number of schools with such whiteboards.

Schools have autonomy to decide how to use their budgets and therefore the purchase of interactive whiteboards or other items of equipment is a matter for school authorities. While many schools that have had new builds have chosen to install interactive whiteboards from their furniture and equipment budget, decisions on how they spend their allocation is again solely a matter for the schools.

Implementation of Inclusion Agenda

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the actions (i) she has taken; and (ii) she is planning to take, to progress the implementation of the inclusion agenda, as outlined in the Bamford Report. (AQW 6488/08)

The Minister of Education: I dtaca le cuimsiú oideachais tá sé mar pholasaí ag an Roinn Oideachais ó bhí 1996 ann páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais (RSO) acu a chur san áireamh i ranganna príomhshruitha.

In terms of educational inclusion DE's policy since 1996 has been to include children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream settings. This presumption to inclusion was strengthened in 2005 by SEN and disability legislation, which introduced the provision that SEN children shall be educated in ordinary schools unless this is incompatible with the wishes of the parent or the provision of efficient education for other children.

The following is an overview of some of the measures and initiatives being taken forward by DE to address many of the issues that are relevant to the education-related Bamford recommendations around children with mental health or learning difficulties. Full details of all the measures will be included in the Government's response to the Bamford Review which is being co-ordinated by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

1. Increased Funding and Resource Planning for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In 2005/06 around £170m was expended in the North of Ireland for provision for SEN children and an additional £53m was allocated to meet the needs of pupils with SEN over the years 2005/06 to 2007/08.

From 2006 the School Census has included a new category of SEN to record Mental Health Issues (MHI). It is hoped that this new category will improve resource planning for pupils with MHI and other learning difficulties.

2. Special educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO)

DE introduced SENDO in 2005 in order to strengthen the rights of SEN pupils to be educated in mainstream schools and to make it unlawful for schools to treat disabled pupils less favourably than other pupils. SENDO also introduced the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS) and an Advice and Information Service.

3. DE Guidance

In order to help schools and ELBs to support SEN pupils, to increase the awareness of specific areas of need and to provide information for parents, DE has made available a range of guidance materials to all schools, ELBs and relevant voluntary sector groups. This includes guidance on Promoting Collaborative Working between health and education professionals and materials on autism, dyslexia, sensory impairment and acquired brain injury.

4. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

To ensure that the children and young people under the care of CAMHS receive the most appropriate support from both health and education services, DE and SEELB are planning, in partnership with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, a new purpose-built Regional Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Centre, including a Learning Resource Centre which will deliver a new flexible education model, on the Forster Green site to bring together the Adolescent Psychiatric Unit and the Child and Family Centre.

5. SEN Review

The DE SEN and Inclusion review has highlighted the vital importance of an effective working partnership with the health sector. To this end, DE is working closely with health colleagues to strengthen and develop links, from a strategic level through to delivery, to gain a shared commitment and ensure that planning, assessment and delivery of therapies is timely and realistic.

6. Anti-bullying

DE funds a regional anti-bullying helpline operated by ChildLine and is working with the local Anti-bullying Forum to promote good practice in tackling bullying in schools. The Forum published new guidance on cyber bullying in November 2007 and a website providing advice and good practice information was launched in March 2008.

7. Promoting Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing

From September 2007 independent counselling support is available in all post-primary schools, which wish it, for a half day per week.

In addition, work has begun on a pupils emotional health and well being programme in post primary

schools. It will focus on positive prevention by building coping skills in children and young people and complements the personal development strand of the curriculum. With funding acquired in Budget 2007 appropriate interventions will be extended to primary and special schools

8. Revised Curriculum

The revised curriculum, which is being phased in from September 2007, includes the new areas of Personal Development & Mutual Understanding at primary level and Learning for Life and Work at post-primary level. These address issues such as promoting good mental and emotional health and the risks posed by drugs and alcohol. Schools are receiving training and guidance materials to support their teaching in these areas.

9. Health and Well-being

DE is working towards a Healthy Schools Policy and has appointed a Healthy Schools Co-ordinator to take this work forward

Kindle Integrated Primary School

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail why only a fifteen working day response period was decided upon when seeking views of the parents of children who attend Kindle Integrated Primary School on the proposal by the SEELB to permanently close the school with effect from 31 August 2008.

(AQW 6511/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt in iúl domh gurbh ó 4 Aibreán go 25 Aibreán a bhí an tréimhse i gcomhair comhairliúcháin fhoirmiúil scríofa do DP 206, Kindle IPS agus gur gnách amuigh is istigh ar thrí seachtainí oibre a cheadú don phróiseas seo.

I am advised by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that the formal written consultation period for DP 206, Kindle IPS, was from 4 April to 25 April and that it is usual to allow about three working weeks for this process.

In addition several consultation meetings were held and these were as follows:

- Board of Governors 8 November 2007
- Staff 29 January and 23 April 2008
- Parents 29 February and 23 April 2008
(Army Families Officer in attendance)
- Army 5 February 2008

Also, a deputation from the school was received by the SEELB Commissioners on 4 February 2008.

Parents may, of course, make their views known to the Department during the 2-month consultation

period following publication of a development proposal but this is a statutory process and the Department does not have any facility to extend this.

Letters of consultation were issued to the Board of Governors, staff and parents of pupils at Kindle IPS, other schools which might be affected by the proposal and Section 75 consultees as set out below.

Schools Consulted;

- Kindle Integrated Primary School – Board of Governors, teachers and parents
- Cumran PS
- Downpatrick PS
- Convent of Mercy PS
- St Patrick's PS Legamaddy
- St Colmcille's PS
- St Joseph's PS, Ballykinlar
- St Joseph's PS, Killough
- St Patrick's Boys PS
- Down Academy
- Down High School
- De La Salle HS
- St Mary's HS
- St Patrick's Grammar School

Section 75 Consultees:

Churches

- Baptist Union of Ireland
- Church of Ireland
- Congregational Union of Ireland
- Elim Pentecostal
- Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Catholic Church

Political Parties

- Alliance Party
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
- Progressive Unionist Party
- Sinn Féin
- Social Democratic Labour Party
- Ulster Democratic Party
- Ulster Unionist Assembly Party
- Ulster Unionist Party
- United Kingdom Unionist Party

Unions

- Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

- UNISON
- National Association of School Teachers & Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
- Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
- National Association of Head Teachers
- Association of Teachers & Lecturers
- Ulster Teachers Union (UTU)

Race

- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

Age – Children

- Children's Law Centre
- NSPCC
- Save the Children
- Barnardos
- Child Care Northern Ireland
- NIPPA
Putting Children First
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Northern Ireland Governing Bodies Association
- National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers & Consultants
- Association of Psychologists
- Library Association
- National Association of Social Workers in Education

Disability

- Disability Action
- MENCAP (Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults)
- Royal National Institute for Deaf People (NI)
- Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)

Marital Status and Dependents

- Parents Advice Centre

Government and Public Sector Bodies

- Equality Commission
- The Community Relations Council
- Department of Education
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
- Down District Council
- Army

Kindle Integrated Primary School

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to extend the response period in relation to the proposal to close Kindle Integrated Primary School. (AQW 6512/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt in iúl domh gurbh ó 4 Aibreán go 25 Aibreán a bhí an tréimhse i gcomhair comhairliúcháin fhoirmiúil scríofa do DP 206, Kindle IPS agus gur gnách amuigh is istigh ar thrí seachtainí oibre a cheadú don phróiseas seo.

I am advised by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that the formal written consultation period for DP 206, Kindle IPS, was from 4 April to 25 April and that it is usual to allow about three working weeks for this process.

In addition several consultation meetings were held and these were as follows:

- Board of Governors 8 November 2007
- Staff 29 January and 23 April 2008
- Parents 29 February and 23 April 2008 (Army Families Officer in attendance)
- Army 5 February 2008

Also, a deputation from the school was received by the SEELB Commissioners on 4 February 2008.

Parents may, of course, make their views known to the Department during the 2-month consultation period following publication of a development proposal but this is a statutory process and the Department does not have any facility to extend this.

Letters of consultation were issued to the Board of Governors, staff and parents of pupils at Kindle IPS, other schools which might be affected by the proposal and Section 75 consultees as set out below.

Schools Consulted;

- Kindle Integrated Primary School – Board of Governors, teachers and parents
- Cumran PS
- Downpatrick PS
- Convent of Mercy PS
- St Patrick's PS Legamaddy
- St Colmcille's PS
- St Joseph's PS, Ballykinlar
- St Joseph's PS, Killough
- St Patrick's Boys PS
- Down Academy
- Down High School
- De La Salle HS

- St Mary's HS
- St Patrick's Grammar School

Section 75 Consultees:

Churches

- Baptist Union of Ireland
- Church of Ireland
- Congregational Union of Ireland
- Elim Pentecostal
- Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Catholic Church

Political Parties

- Alliance Party
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
- Progressive Unionist Party
- Sinn Féin
- Social Democratic Labour Party
- Ulster Democratic Party
- Ulster Unionist Assembly Party
- Ulster Unionist Party
- United Kingdom Unionist Party

Unions

- Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
- UNISON
- National Association of School Teachers & Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
- Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
- National Association of Head Teachers
- Association of Teachers & Lecturers
- Ulster Teachers Union (UTU)

Race

- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

Age – Children

- Children's Law Centre
- NSPCC
- Save the Children
- Barnardos
- Child Care Northern Ireland
- NIPPA
Putting Children First
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

- Northern Ireland Governing Bodies Association
- National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers & Consultants
- Association of Psychologists
- Library Association
- National Association of Social Workers in Education

Disability

- Disability Action
- MENCAP (Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults)
- Royal National Institute for Deaf People (NI)
- Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)

Marital Status and Dependants

- Parents Advice Centre

Government and Public Sector Bodies

- Equality Commission
- The Community Relations Council
- Department of Education
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
- Down District Council
- Army

Kindle Integrated Primary School

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to list the names of the individuals and organisations that were contacted directly and offered the opportunity to respond to the proposal by the SEELB to close Kindle Integrated Primary School. (AQW 6513/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt in iúl domh gurbh ó 4 Aibreán go 25 Aibreán a bhí an tréimhse i gcomhair comhairliúcháin fhoirmiúil scríofa do DP 206, Kindle IPS agus gur gnách amuigh is istigh ar thrí seachtainí oibre a cheadú don phróiseas seo.

I am advised by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that the formal written consultation period for DP 206, Kindle IPS, was from 4 April to 25 April and that it is usual to allow about three working weeks for this process.

In addition several consultation meetings were held and these were as follows:

- Board of Governors 8 November 2007
- Staff 29 January and 23 April 2008
- Parents 29 February and 23 April 2008 (Army Families Officer in attendance)
- Army 5 February 2008

Also, a deputation from the school was received by the SEELB Commissioners on 4 February 2008.

Parents may, of course, make their views known to the Department during the 2-month consultation period following publication of a development proposal but this is a statutory process and the Department does not have any facility to extend this.

Letters of consultation were issued to the Board of Governors, staff and parents of pupils at Kindle IPS, other schools which might be affected by the proposal and Section 75 consultees as set out below.

Schools Consulted;

- Kindle Integrated Primary School – Board of Governors, teachers and parents
- Cumran PS
- Downpatrick PS
- Convent of Mercy PS
- St Patrick's PS Legamaddy
- St Colmcille's PS
- St Joseph's PS, Ballykinlar
- St Joseph's PS, Killough
- St Patrick's Boys PS
- Down Academy
- Down High School
- De La Salle HS
- St Mary's HS
- St Patrick's Grammar School

Section 75 Consultees:

Churches

- Baptist Union of Ireland
- Church of Ireland
- Congregational Union of Ireland
- Elim Pentecostal
- Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Catholic Church

Political Parties

- Alliance Party
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Unionist Party
- Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
- Progressive Unionist Party
- Sinn Féin
- Social Democratic Labour Party
- Ulster Democratic Party
- Ulster Unionist Assembly Party
- Ulster Unionist Party
- United Kingdom Unionist Party

Unions

- Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
- UNISON
- National Association of School Teachers & Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
- Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
- National Association of Head Teachers
- Association of Teachers & Lecturers
- Ulster Teachers Union (UTU)

Race

- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

Age – Children

- Children's Law Centre
- NSPCC
- Save the Children
- Barnardos
- Child Care Northern Ireland
- NIPPA
Putting Children First
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Northern Ireland Governing Bodies Association
- National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers & Consultants
- Association of Psychologists
- Library Association
- National Association of Social Workers in Education

Disability

- Disability Action
- MENCAP (Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults)
- Royal National Institute for Deaf People (NI)
- Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)

Marital Status and Dependants

- Parents Advice Centre

Government and Public Sector Bodies

- Equality Commission
- The Community Relations Council
- Department of Education
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
- Down District Council
- Army

Secondary School Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary school age children being educated in 2007-2008 in each of the five Education Board areas in (i) the Integrated sector; (ii) Irish medium schools; (iii) controlled schools; (iv)

maintained schools; (v) special needs schools; and (vi) any other schools. (AQW 6514/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY AGED PUPILS BY MANAGEMENT TYPE AND EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD 2007/08

Management Type	ELB					Total
	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
Controlled	5,597	6,126	14,747	10,462	11,064	47,996
Catholic maintained ¹	8,205	10,246	6,078	4,469	11,765	40,763
Other maintained ²	506	0	0	0	0	506
Controlled integrated	0	0	336	1,532	436	2,304
Grant Maintained Integrated	1,599	1,865	2,174	2,213	1,092	8,943
Voluntary - Other managed	8,142	1,346	5,050	4,089	1,308	19,935
Voluntary - Catholic managed	6,236	7,129	3,889	2,869	7,372	27,495
Special ³	586	414	589	659	218	2,466
Independent ³	0	17	64	258	112	451
Hospital ³	51	142	0	0	0	193

Source: NI school census 2007/08

1 Includes 27 pupils in an Irish medium unit in a WELB post-primary school and 99 pupils in an Irish medium unit in an SELB post-primary school.

2 The other maintained sector consists of one Irish medium school.

3 Taken as children age 11 and over at 1 July 2007.

Primary School Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school age children being educated in 2007-2008 in each of the five Education Board areas in (i) the Integrated sector; (ii) Irish medium schools; (iii) controlled schools; (iv)

maintained schools; (v) special needs schools; and (vi) other schools. (AQW 6515/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

PRIMARY1 AGED PUPILS BY MANAGEMENT TYPE AND EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD 2007/08

Management Type	ELB					Total
	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
Controlled	9,007	8,327	22,609	20,132	13,637	73,712
Controlled - Irish medium	71	0	0	0	0	71
Voluntary	1,281	0	141	612	41	2,075
Catholic maintained	11,489	18,641	11,160	9,924	21,319	72,533
Catholic maintained -Irish medium	0	133	0	0	0	133
Other maintained	0	0	102	0	273	375
Other maintained - Irish medium	973	337	129	181	215	1,835

Management Type	ELB					Total
	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
Controlled integrated	226	34	593	1,251	105	2,209
Grant Maintained Integrated	597	988	1,174	1,074	1,135	4,968
Special ²	624	310	408	488	175	2,005
Independent ²	0	44	18	140	111	313
Hospital ²	29	21	0	0	0	50

Source: NI school census 2007/08

1 Primary includes year 1 to 7 classes only.

2 Primary age children includes all children aged 4 to 10 on the 1st July 2007.

Secondary School Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary school age children in the maintained sector in each of the five Education Boards in 2007-2008 that are educated in (i) Grammar schools; (ii) junior high schools; (iii)

senior high schools; (iv) comprehensive schools; (v) six form centres; and (vi) other secondary schools.

(AQW 6516/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY AGED PUPILS BY MANAGEMENT TYPE AND EDUCATION BOARD – INCLUDING JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGHS, SPECIAL, INDEPENDENT AND HOSPITAL SCHOOLS 2007/08

Management type	School type	ELB				
		BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB
Controlled	Secondary	3,735	3,667	10,160	7,035	5,868
	Grammar	1,862	2,459	4,587	3,427	1,312
Catholic maintained	Secondary	8,205	10,246	6,078	4,469	11,282
Other maintained	Secondary	506	0	0	0	0
Controlled integrated	Secondary	0	0	336	1,532	436
Grant Maintained Integrated	Secondary	1,599	1,865	2,174	2,213	1,092
Voluntary - Other managed	Grammar	8,142	1,346	5,050	4,089	1,308
Voluntary - Catholic managed	Grammar	6,236	7,129	3,889	2,869	6,802
Junior Highs	Secondary	0	0	0	0	2,504
Senior Highs	Secondary	0	0	0	0	661
	Grammar	0	0	0	0	1,772
Independent	N/A	0	17	64	258	112
Hospital	N/A	51	142	0	0	0
Special	N/A	586	414	589	659	218

Source: NI school census 2007/08

Note:

1: Figures for Controlled secondary exclude figures for junior highs in the SELB areas.

2: Figures for Voluntary Catholic managed grammar and Controlled secondary and grammar exclude figures for senior highs in the SELB area.

3: Post primary school aged children in independent, hospital and special schools includes all children aged 11 to 19 on the 1st July 2007.

Secondary School Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary school age children in the controlled sector in each of the five Education Boards in 2007-2008 that are educated in (i) Grammar schools; (ii) junior high schools; (iii) senior high schools; (iv)

sixth form centres; (v) comprehensive schools; and (vi) other secondary schools. (AQW 6517/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY AGED PUPILS BY MANAGEMENT TYPE AND EDUCATION BOARD – INCLUDING JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGHS, SPECIAL, INDEPENDENT AND HOSPITAL SCHOOLS 2007/08

Management type	School type	ELB				
		BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB
Controlled	Secondary	3,735	3,667	10,160	7,035	5,868
	Grammar	1,862	2,459	4,587	3,427	1,312
Catholic maintained	Secondary	8,205	10,246	6,078	4,469	11,282
Other maintained	Secondary	506	0	0	0	0
Controlled integrated	Secondary	0	0	336	1,532	436
Grant Maintained Integrated	Secondary	1,599	1,865	2,174	2,213	1,092
Voluntary - Other managed	Grammar	8,142	1,346	5,050	4,089	1,308
Voluntary - Catholic managed	Grammar	6,236	7,129	3,889	2,869	6,802
Junior Highs	Secondary	0	0	0	0	2,504
Senior Highs	Secondary	0	0	0	0	661
	Grammar	0	0	0	0	1,772
Independent	N/A	0	17	64	258	112
Hospital	N/A	51	142	0	0	0
Special	N/A	586	414	589	659	218

Source: NI school census 2007/08

Note:

- Figures for Controlled secondary exclude figures for junior highs in the SELB areas.
- Figures for Voluntary Catholic managed grammar and Controlled secondary and grammar exclude figures for senior highs in the SELB area.
- Post primary school aged children in independent, hospital and special schools includes all children aged 11 to 19 on the 1st July 2007.

Secondary School Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary school age children in the controlled sector in the North Down parliamentary constituency in 2007-2008 that are educated in (i) Grammar schools; (ii) comprehensive schools; (iii) sixth form colleges; and (iv) other secondary schools. (AQW 6518/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY PUPILS ATTENDING SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BY MANAGEMENT TYPE 2007/08

School Type	Management type				Independent ¹
	Controlled	Catholic maintained	Controlled integrated	Voluntary - Other managed	
Secondary	1,502	545	423	0	0
Grammar	1,073	0	0	1,955	0
Special ¹	67	0	0	0	0
Other ²	0	0	0	0	169

Source: NI school census 2007/08

- 1 Post primary school aged children in special and independent schools includes all children aged 11 to 19 on the 1st July 2007.
- 2 The Other category consists of Independent schools only, there are no hospital schools in the North Down constituency.
- 3 There are no sixth form colleges in the North Down constituency.

Complaints in Schools

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to introduce a formal procedure for dealing with parental complaints, inclusive of an appeals process, across all Education Boards. (AQW 6540/08)

The Minister of Education: The development of parental complaints procedures is a matter for each individual school. The Department has no active role in dealing with general parental complaints received by schools. Some employing authorities have developed guidance and model procedures for schools to adopt.

The Department has exhorted that all employing authorities should have consistent guidance and model procedures to address parental complaints. The employing authorities have agreed to examine the current guidance and model procedures with the intention of developing a single guidance document, incorporating a model procedure.

Tá molta ag an Roinn fosta gur cheart go mbeadh an próiseas achomhairc leagtha síos go soiléir sa cháipéisíocht agus go gcuirfeadh sé comhairle ar fáil do thuismitheoirí maidir leis na roghanna atá acu chun breis achomhairc a dhéanamh taobh amuigh den chóras oideachais.

The Department has also suggested that such documentation should clearly outline the appeals process and provide advice to parents on avenues for further appeal outside the education system.

Kindle Integrated Primary School

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education, in the event that Kindle Primary School were to close, to detail the action she will take to ensure that children attending the school will be placed in alternative schools that will offer the safety and potential that they currently have. (AQW 6586/08)

The Minister of Education: Dheimhnigh Bord Oideachais an Oir-Dheiscirt más amhlaidh go ndruideann Bunscoil Imeachtha Kindle go mbeadh go leor spáis ann sna scoileanna is cóngaraí di glacadh le daltaí ó Kindle.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board has confirmed that, should Kindle Integrated Primary School close, the nearest alternative schools would have sufficient capacity to take pupils from Kindle.

Special Education Needs Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, to detail the number of primary school children with special education needs in the North Down Borough Council area, broken down by electoral ward. (AQW 6592/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

PRIMARY1 SCHOOL PUPILS IN THE NORTH DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS BY WARD – 2003/04 – 2007/08

Ward Name	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Ballycrochan	56	52	34	46	72
Ballyholme	49	47	57	62	63
Ballymaconell	187	180	176	172	161
Bangor Castle	88	83	74	71	54
Bloomfield (North Down)	94	108	95	114	101
Bryansburn	47	76	79	67	74
Clandeboyne	121	120	107	87	75
Conlig	9	*	6	8	11
Craigavad	21	34	30	30	35
Crawfordsburn	48	33	42	46	36
Groomsport	6	8	9	9	0
Harbour (North Down)	5	*	6	6	7
Hollywood Demesne	76	112	108	107	123
Loughview	74	64	56	64	32
Rathgael	62	64	60	62	44
Spring Hill	48	65	58	69	79

Source: NI school census

1 Primary includes nursery classes, reception classes and years 1 – 7.

* relates to less than 5 cases.

Spending on Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of money spent by her Department on publicity and advertising in 2007-08. (AQW 6655/08)

The Minister of Education: Ba é £46,586.58 an mhéid a chaith an Roinn Oideachais ar phoiblíocht agus ar fhógraíocht i 2007-08.

The amount spent by the Department of Education on publicity and advertising during 2007-08 was £46,586.58.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to outline if it is intended that 'core' courses at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism will be conducted on the basis of seven day weeks, or if it is intended that those on the course will return home at weekends. (AQW 6691/08)

The Minister of Education: It is planned that children will attend the Centre for assessment either for the 2 day educational assessment or for the 5 week learning support assessment. If attending for the 2 day assessment, a child/young person will normally be accompanied by their parents/guardians and if appropriate other family members who will all stay on site in the family accommodation provided during the assessment. If a child/young person attends for the 5 week learning support assessment their attendance will depend on their individual circumstances. For the learning support service, attendance will normally be for 5 week days at a time with the child/young person returning home for the weekends. If, however, during the initial assessment of the child/young person's needs it is deemed appropriate that his/her circumstances are such that they would benefit from staying for 7 days a week then this can be arranged. Similarly, if a child lives locally and wishes to return home in the evenings then this can also be arranged.

Bunófar gach cinneadh ar an tréimhse a chaithfidh páiste/duine óg san Ionad ar mheasúnú ar a riachtanas aonair.

Each decision regarding a child/young person's stay at the Centre will be based on an assessment of his/her individual need.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to outline projected costs for employing staff at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism, taking into account posts already filled and posts recently

advertised, and including pension and national insurance costs. (AQW 6692/08)

The Minister of Education: The costs for employing staff at the Middletown Centre for Autism for the financial year 2008-2009 are estimated to be approximately £595,000.

Cuimsíonn na costais seo costais an fhostóra agus costais pinsean agus cumhdaíonn siad an fhoireann atá fostaithe ag an Ionad cheana féin, na poist a fógraíodh ar na mallaibh agus poist bhreise atá le hearcú sa bhliain airgeadais seo.

These costs include the employer costs and pension costs and cover, the staff already employed by the Centre, the posts recently advertised and further posts due to be recruited this financial year.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education (i) to clarify if she has made arrangements for medical services, including emergency and consultant paediatric services, at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism; and (ii) if so, to outline the basis upon which these services are contracted and with whom they are contracted. (AQW 6693/08)

The Minister of Education: Following referral to the Centre, every child/young person will be individually assessed prior to attending the Centre for their educational assessment. This will include a risk assessment, which will consider their possible medical needs whilst in residence at the Centre. If it were the opinion of the full range of professionals involved, that a child could not attend the Centre due to his or her complex medical needs, then a placement in the Centre would not be offered. Alternative arrangements would be considered via the Outreach Service provided by the Centre. As is the case within the school sector, children's medication needs will be provided for in line with guidance available from the Department of Education.

I have been advised by the Centre's Chief Executive Officer that members of the Management Team have met with the Southern Health and Social Services Board to clarify what medical support services will be required once the Centre is fully operational. He has also advised that the Centre is considering the need to employ staff with medical expertise, as appropriate. In common with other educational provision in the South Armagh area, the Centre will use Accident & Emergency services provided by Craigavon Area Hospital where this is necessary. The Centre also plans to consult with the Health Service Executive in the South to ascertain the nature of the medical services they can provide.

The Centre is planning to establish a contract with local General Practitioners to provide GP services when necessary.

There is still some detailed work to be carried out with regards to the planning of services, including that around the residential attendance of children. Now that the Management Team at the Centre is in place they are at a crucial stage in the development of all services. They will be liaising with the relevant authorities to ensure that all the necessary arrangements are in place before children can attend the Centre.

Ba mhaith liom a chur in iúl nach gnách le húdaráis i suíomhanna oideachais sa Tuaisceart conradh a bheith acu le seirbhísí míochaine ná le pédiatraithe comhairleacha ina gceantar, cé go molar do thuismitheoirí pháistí teagmháil a dhéanamh le DGí áitiúla i gceantar na scoile lena bpáiste a chlarú má tá siad i gcúram fadtéarmach cónaithe i scoil.

Minor Works Capital Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to confirm whether 100% capital works funding for voluntary youth clubs will be available to applications received before 1 May 2008. (AQW 6694/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department recently increased the funding for voluntary organisations for Minor Works Capital projects from 85% of up to £100,000 to 100% funding of up to £150,000. I issued a press release on 22 April 2008 announcing these changes.

There are currently 63 projects being progressed under the previous Youth Service Minor Works Capital Scheme and these will be paid at 85% of up to £100,000. The existing applications from voluntary youth clubs have received approval and a letter of offer for funding at 85% of up to £100,000. These clubs have accepted this offer. There will be no retrospective funding for voluntary youth clubs that have received and accepted their letter of offer from the Department based on the 85% application as this was part of the criteria required for the scheme.

The existing Minor Works Capital Scheme closed on 1 May 2008 and no further applications will be accepted after that date. The Department will be developing a new Minor Works Scheme with revised criteria, application and assessment procedures.

Aon uair amháin a chríochnófar seo, seolfar an scéim nua agus ansin beidh clubanna deonacha óige in ann iarratas a chur isteach ar mhaoiniú suas go 100% de £150,000 i gcomhair mionoibreacha caipitil.

Once this has been completed the new scheme will be launched and voluntary youth clubs will then be

able to apply for funding of up to 100% of £150,000 for capital minor works.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the projected estimate of staff costs including salary, pension and national insurance in relation to the employment of staff at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism for each of 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013. (AQW 6706/08)

The Minister of Education: Is mar seo a leanas a mheastar na costais foirne réamh-mheasta d'Ionad Uathachais an Bhaile Láir, ina n-áirítear costais tuarastal, pinsean agus árachais náisiúnta:

Cuimsíonn na figiúirí seo ardú 2.5% i gcomhair ardaithe pá gach bliain ó 2009/10 ar aghaidh.

The projected staff costs including salary, pension and national insurance costs for the Middletown Centre for Autism are estimated as follows:

Year	Salary costs £
2009/10	1,832,662
2010/11	2,437,274
2011/12	2,498,206
2012/13	2,560,662

These figures include a 2.5% uplift for pay increase each year from 2009/10 onwards.

Balmoral High School

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 471/07, what plans she has for the future for (i) Balmoral High School; (ii) playing facilities associated with this school; and (iii) working in partnership with local district councils to develop the playing facilities for community use. (AQW 6739/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní dhearnadh aon chinneadh go fóill ar úsáid áiseanna amach anseo nuair a dhruidfear Ardscoil Balmoral i Mí Lúnasa 2008. Tá an Roinn agus Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlaine Bhéal Feirste (BOLBF) ag iarraidh teacht ar úsáid eile agus breithneofar úsáid áiseanna mar chuid den phróiseas seo. Críochnaíodh dréachtpháipéar roghanna agus tá sé ag an Roinn faoi láthair i gcomhair athbhreithnithe.

No decision has yet been taken on the future use of facilities when Balmoral High School closes in August 2008. The Department and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) are seeking an alternative use

and the use of playing facilities will also be considered as part of this process. A draft options paper has been completed and is currently with the Department for review.

Children with English as an Additional Language

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of children in (i) the North Down constituency; and (ii) Northern Ireland, that have been taught English as an additional language. (AQW 6760/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

CHILDREN WITH ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AT GRANT AIDED SCHOOLS, 2003/04 – 2007/08

	North Down	Northern Ireland
2003/04	72	1,514
2004/05	92	2,056
2005/06	87	2,681
2006/07	96	3,911
2007/08	145	5,665

Source: NI school census.

Note:

1. A child with English as an additional language (EAL) is defined as one for whom English is not their first language and who has significant difficulty with the English language and requires assistance.
2. Figures for EAL children in special schools were not collected until 2006/07.

Post-Primary Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of children in the maintained sector educated in (i) grammar schools; (ii) comprehensive schools; (iii) sixth form centres; and (iv) other secondary schools, in the North Down constituency. (AQW 6761/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY PUPILS ATTENDING SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BY MANAGEMENT TYPE 2007/08

School Type	Management type				Independent ¹
	Controlled	Catholic maintained	Controlled integrated	Voluntary - Other managed	
Secondary	1,502	545	423	0	0
Grammar	1,073	0	0	1,955	0
Special ¹	67	0	0	0	0
Other ²	0	0	0	0	169

Source: NI school census 2007/08

- 1 Post primary school aged children in special and independent schools includes all children aged 11 to 19 on the 1st July 2007.
- 2 The Other category consists of Independent schools only; there are no hospital schools in the North Down constituency.
- 3 There are no Irish medium post primary schools in the North Down constituency.
- 4 There are no sixth form colleges in the North Down constituency.

Post-Primary Pupil Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of secondary school children in the North Down constituency that are educated in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) integrated schools; (iv) Irish-medium schools; (v) special needs schools; and (vi) other schools. (AQW 6762/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

POST PRIMARY PUPILS ATTENDING SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BY MANAGEMENT TYPE 2007/08

School Type	Management type				Independent ¹
	Controlled	Catholic maintained	Controlled integrated	Voluntary - Other managed	
Secondary	1,502	545	423	0	0
Grammar	1,073	0	0	1,955	0
Special ¹	67	0	0	0	0
Other ²	0	0	0	0	169

Source: NI school census 2007/08

- 1 Post primary school aged children in special and independent schools

includes all children aged 11 to 19 on the 1st July 2007.

- 2 The Other category consists of Independent schools only; there are no hospital schools in the North Down constituency.
- 3 There are no Irish medium post primary schools in the North Down constituency.
- 4 There are no sixth form colleges in the North Down constituency.

Primary School Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of primary school children in the North Down constituency that are educated in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) integrated schools; (iv) Irish-medium schools; (v) special needs schools; and (vi) other schools. (AQW 6763/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

PRIMARY 1, 2 SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NORTH DOWN BY MANAGEMENT TYPE, 2007/08

Management type	Number of children
Controlled	4,554
Voluntary	321
Catholic maintained	815
Other maintained	0
Controlled integrated	790
Grant Maintained Integrated	0
Special3	44
Independent3	140
Hospital3	0

Source: NI school census 2007/08

- 1 Primary includes year 1 to 7 classes only.
- 2 There are no Irish Medium primary schools in the North Down constituency.
- 3 Primary age children includes all children aged 4 to 10 on the 1st July 2007.

Absence Figures

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education how many days sick leave, on average, were taken by staff in her Department over each of the last five years. (AQW 6910/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Year	Average number of days lost per staff year due to sickness absence
2003/04	11.7
2004/05	12.8
2005/06	12.9
2006/07	12.2
2007/08	11.9 (Estimate)

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Educational Targets

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will address the latest figures that show that young male protestants are not meeting educational achievement targets and are well below the average in both rural and urban areas. (AQW 6492/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The issue of underachievement of any young person in Northern Ireland, regardless of background or geographical location, is a matter of concern to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in that it has obviously significant implications not only for the young people themselves, but also for the supply of skills to meet the needs of the local economy. I understand that the figures to which you refer relate to school leavers and that you have already received a response from the Minister for Education in relation to these.

I am committed to ensuring that every effort is made within DEL's remit to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to maximize their potential, and have in place a range of measures to take forward this objective. In this respect, I would refer you to the detailed material that DEL is in the process of providing to the question that you raised in the DEL evidence session to the OFMDFM Committee Inquiry into Child Poverty on 2 April 2008.

In particular, DEL's main engagement with young people is via the Careers Service, which has, as a priority area, the engagement of those 16-18 year olds who are not in education, training, or employment. Also, the Training for Success provision targets 16-24 years olds and allows them to enter training at an appropriate level and progress to a stage where they can maximise their potential through the development of personal and employability skills and the achievement of qualifications and

employment. Further Education Colleges play a key role in collaboration with schools, for example through the Vocational Enhancement Programme, and also in terms of addressing Essential Skills needs. In September 2008 a pilot for new learner support arrangements between Further Education colleges and third party organisations will commence, targeted at those aged 19-65, not in work, who do not hold a qualification at level 2 or above, or who have many barriers to learning. For unemployed jobseekers within the age group of 18 to 24 years, New Deal is mandatory. After the initial 'Gateway' period (during which a New Deal Personal Adviser provides advice, guidance and assistance with jobsearch), jobseekers who have not found work, enter one of four options offering work experience, training or subsidised employment.

Furthermore, specifically in relation to young male Protestants, you will wish to be aware that my Department has responsibility for 8 of the 62 actions in the Renewing Communities Action Plan. DEL actions deal with improving life prospects by raising educational achievement, vocational attainment and employability, and growing civic and community leadership and active citizenship. An evaluation of the Renewing Communities Actions will be available later this year and will provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of these actions and recommendations on how appropriate aspects of the initiative can be continued within mainstream FE adult community education provision. It will also help to inform future FE policy development tailored to meet the needs of working class Protestant communities.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of working days lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6501/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The table on the following page sets out the number of working days lost in the Department due to stress related illnesses in the 24 months from 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2008.

Month	Number Of Working Days Lost
April 2006	399
May 2006	370
June 2006	315
July 2006	271
August 2006	325
September 2006	320

Month	Number Of Working Days Lost
October 2006	410
November 2006	441
December 2006	335
January 2007	285
February 2007	291
March 2007	377
April 2007	337
May 2007	429
June 2007	511
July 2007	400
August 2007	385
September 2007	306
October 2007	380
November 2007	445
December 2007	414
January 2008	471
February 2008	474
March 2008	495

Departmental Legal Costs

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the amount of money his Department has spent on (i) legal costs due to challenges in court; and (ii) compensation settlements, since May 2007. (AQW 6581/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The amount this Department has spent on (i) legal costs due to challenges in court; and (ii) compensation settlements, since May 2007 is as follows:

Legal Costs	£16,395.53
Compensation Settlements	£5,250
Total Amount	£21,645.53

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the amount of money spent by his Department on publicity and advertising in 2007-08. (AQW 6656/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: During the financial year of 2007-8, the Department

for Employment and Learning spent £369,000 on three major advertising campaigns.

- £150,000 was spent on launching the department's new Training for Success initiative which replaced JobSkills.
- £142,000 was spent on the Essential Skills advertising campaign.
- £77,000 was spent on Investors in People advertising campaign.

With regards to publicity the department spent £10k on an external PR company to provide PR support to the Essential Skills advertising campaign.

During 2007/8, the Department monitored, evaluated and reviewed the outcomes of all advertising and publicity activity against departmental objectives and targets, with a view to maximising return on investment and ensuring value for money.

All Ireland Employment

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the enhancement of all-Ireland employment opportunities. (AQW 6688/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I met Minister Martin on 4 September 2007 and, during a very useful dialogue, we discussed a wide range of employment and skills related matters of interest to both jurisdictions. Those discussions included the idea of an all-Island Skills conference and I'm delighted to say that planning is underway for such an event later this year. Although not specifically covered on the day, both Governments are fully aware that a long and

productive tradition of collaboration exists between the Employment and Training Services in NI and RoI. This is soundly based on information sharing and, where appropriate, practical harmonisation of systems and services including the exchange of job vacancies, annual events to promote the exchange of ideas on cross-border employment service issues and regular joint meetings between the Boards of DEL and FÁS, the Training and Employment Authority in RoI. Joint activity of this nature helps, in a very practical way to strengthen the links between our services and enhances the skills development and job opportunities for our respective jobseeker clients.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the websites that come under his Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6754/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning. The table includes the number of visitors since devolution as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visits to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement.

The table also lists the maintenance cost associated with each site. Some Department for Employment and Learning sites are hosted and maintained within the NICS Delivery & Innovation Division or with Fujitsu under the Department's PFI contract.

WEBSITES THAT COME UNDER DEL'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Website	Visitors	Page Views	Maintenance
www.delni.gov.uk	480,233	2,337,775	£3,208
www.jobcentreonline.com	5,072,529	65,000,297	£64,168
www.employersonlineni.com	30,246	142,191	£10,481
www.careersserviceni.com	336,157	1,221,054	£33,298
www.trainingforsuccess.co.uk	14,728	107,336	£600
www.industrialcourt.gov.uk	Less than 100	unobtainable	Nil
www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk	3,377	564,626	£12,377
www.customeraid.delni.gov.uk	231	1,303	£6,156
https://redundancyni.gov.uk	3,650	22,896	£13,606

Media Monitoring Expenditures

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how much he has spent on media monitoring since devolution. (AQW 6757/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: There has been a total of £18,165.80 spent on media monitoring by the Department for Employment and Learning since devolution up to 30 April 2008.

Liaison Work with DEL

Mr Burnside asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the additional costs, including costs associated with employee deployment, incurred by his Department, in relation to liaison work between his Department and the Department of Education. (AQW 6788/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Liaison between my Department and other Departments, including the Department of Education, is integral to the successful achievement of those Programme for Government priorities for which we have responsibility. For this reason, it is impossible to isolate any 'additional' costs associated with joined-up working. There is a high level of interaction between the two Departments, particularly on the key issues of skills development, 14-19 curriculum development, and careers education and guidance. Without significant research and analysis, it would be very difficult to isolate any additional costs associated with this level of liaison work.

Further Education in Strabane

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his plans to redress the imbalance in further education provision in the Strabane District Council area, in the short to medium term. (AQW 6790/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: It is the responsibility of individual Further Education colleges in Northern Ireland to determine the provision to be offered at each of their campuses. I have been advised by North West Regional College that, wherever possible, provision at its Strabane campus is linked to the level of demand. My Department is also engaging with the college on proposals for new premises at Strabane, which will help the College to improve further its facilities at this site.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how much his Department has spent on equality impact assessments and consultations over the last three years. (AQW 6171/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): The amount of money spent on equality impact assessments and consultations by my Department over the last three years is detailed in the table below.

	(£)
2005/06	33,515
2006/07	35,147
2007/08	70,754

St Patrick's Trail

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm if the St Patrick/Christian Heritage signature project of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board includes post-reformation Christian heritage, including Presbyterianism. (AQW 6367/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The St. Patrick's Trail embraces all three phases of Christianity in Northern Ireland; early Christian, Medieval and post-reformation.

This includes sites related to St. Patrick and the early Christian Saints including St. Gall and St. Columbanus in Bangor, the medieval abbeys at Greyabbey and Inch, and post-reformation churches such as St. Patrick's in Newry.

Also included on the Trail is Craigavon Museum, which includes tracts and hymnals from John and Charles Wesley, the Philip Wilson Library, a collection of Quaker books and letters and a Methodist Book Collection.

NITB has worked with Craigavon Borough Council in the development of their individual Christian Heritage Trail and is currently working with Church representatives and local tourism operators in Bangor to develop interpretation at Bangor Abbey, St. Columbanus Church and First Presbyterian Church to enhance the visitor experience on the Trail further.

Single Electricity Market

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions he has had with Northern Ireland power plants in relation to the single energy market. (AQW 6447/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have not had any meetings with Northern Ireland power plant operators in relation to the Single Electricity Market (SEM) that was established on 1 November 2007. I have met with representatives from the Viridian Group on 26 July 2007 and again on 4 March 2008 when Northern Ireland energy issues, including the Single Electricity Market were discussed.

Single Electricity Market

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the single energy market regulators. (AQW 6448/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The two Regulatory Authorities, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Commission for Energy Regulation in the Irish Republic are jointly responsible for regulating the Single Electricity Market ("SEM") in a coordinated manner.

They do this through a SEM Committee that was established with a statutory duty to protect the interests of consumers and have regard to the need to avoid unfair discrimination between consumers in Northern Ireland and consumers in Ireland. The Committee has three members from each Regulatory Authority plus an independent member and deputy independent member. The Committee makes decisions on the basis of one vote for each Regulator and one vote for the independent member. The Regulatory Authorities are also under a statutory duty to publish their joint working arrangements for the SEM.

These measures help ensure transparent regulation and clear decision making that is in the best interest of the SEM and consumers.

Single Electricity Market

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the single energy market. (AQW 6449/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Single Electricity Market ("SEM") only began trading on 1 November 2007 and it is too soon to make a full assessment of the new market. However, I did recently ask the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation to provide me with their view

of progress on the SEM over the early months of operation.

The indications are that the SEM is operating in line with the two Regulatory Authorities' expectations and is meeting the overall objectives for the market. In particular, the financial and dispatch systems are operating correctly. The Authorities' joint SEM Committee has taken an active role to ensure market transparency and is currently considering its response to concerns from some market participants on how the bidding rules are being applied. NIAUR advise that the type of issues that are being dealt with by the Committee are to be expected in the early days of a new market.

Wind Turbines

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many megawatt hours of electricity are currently generated by wind energy. (AQW 6457/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In the year ended 31 March 2008, there was 441Gigawatt hours (441,000MWh) of renewables generation in Northern Ireland of which 97% were from wind. This represents around 5% electricity consumption.

Renewable Energy Targets

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many megawatt hours of electricity will need to be generated by wind energy in order to achieve the Executive's 2012 and 2025 renewable energy targets. (AQW 6463/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: On current estimates for total electricity consumption in 2012/13, 1,196Gigawatt hours of electricity generated from renewable sources in Northern Ireland will be required to meet our 12% target. The target does, however, include a sub-target that 15% of that renewable element should be from non-wind sources: wind generation would therefore be expected to contribute some 1,016,940 megawatt-hours.

There is no formal 2025 renewable energy target although the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy has identified a 40% renewable electricity contribution beyond 2025 as one of a number of steps contributing to the target for a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. This is a challenging step that is subject to the technological and economic feasibility issues considered in the Grid Study that was published earlier this year. That Study envisages 4.8 Terrawatt-hours (4.8million MWh) of

renewables in 2020 as being technologically feasible representing 42% of consumption in Northern Ireland with wind accounting for over 85% of renewables capacity. This level of renewables will be considered further in light of grid infrastructure requirements and their costs as well as the potential implications of the forthcoming new EC Renewables Directive which will set targets for total energy consumption in 2020.

Action Renewables and Job Growth

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm if (i) any research has been carried out by his Department into the potential for job creation opportunities from renewables; and (ii) his Department will publish any research undertaken; and to detail the conclusions reached from any research undertaken. (AQW 6481/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In April 2005, Action Renewables, an organisation funded by my Department, carried out a high level background study into the job creation opportunities from renewables in Northern Ireland to inform policy development. In addition, since September 2007, Invest NI has been working on a Study commissioned by Intertrade Ireland and Forfas to review the Environmental Goods & Services (EGS) Sector and identify opportunities for local companies. The aims of the study are:

- To estimate broadly the size of the EGS sector on the island of Ireland
- To examine the market drivers, the strengths and weaknesses of each sub-sector
- To identify the promising areas in the EGS sector where opportunities are likely to occur

While jobs are not specified as a measure of growth it would be expected that job creation would be part of the overall sector development.

There are no plans to distribute the work undertaken by Action Renewables, as this was used to inform internal policy development and is now several years old. The report did indicate that there is good potential for job creation in Northern Ireland arising from the development of a renewable energy industry and co-existing manufacturing capacity, for example, wind turbine manufacture, turbine component manufacture and production of biomass products. It is expected that the review of the EGS sector will be completed by May/June 08, and a decision to publish will be taken in due course by the steering committee.

Renewable Energy Targets

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his Department's assessment

of the number of jobs created over the last 5 years from energy generation from (i) wind power; (ii) solar power; and (iii) wave and tidal power; and to detail the potential for job creation in each of these areas over the next (a) 5 years; and (b) 10 years. (AQW 6482/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The key measure of progress in renewables development is the amount of installed electricity generation capacity from renewable sources and how it contributes to our 2012 target that 12% of electricity consumption should be from indigenous renewable energy sources. No specific data is held on the jobs created by that development although it should be noted that renewables generation, particularly wind, in Northern Ireland has increased by 60% since the introduction of the NI Renewables Obligation in 2005. The number of windfarms established since then has increased by 5 to 16.

A high level background study carried out by Action Renewables in 2005 to inform policy development, indicated that there is good potential for job creation in Northern Ireland from the development of a renewable energy industry and co-existing manufacturing capacity for example wind turbine manufacture or the production of biomass products. In the short to medium term, up to 5 years, potential job creation will be dominated by on shore wind energy generation, while over the longer term potential job creation may be spread across a wider range of emerging technologies, for example marine energy, biomass and waste technologies.

Invest NI continues to work with a significant number of clients who are active within the renewable energy sector in order to grow their businesses and expand operations into foreign markets. This includes companies involved in wind energy, biomass, biodiesel, energy from waste, tidal power, solar energy, heat pumps and energy from reconstituted coal. In addition, Invest NI has very close working relationships with the local universities with regard to encouraging new technology developments in the renewables area.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr Ford asked the the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm (i) if he is aware of the World Wildlife Fund Scotland report 'A smart, successful, sustainable Scotland'; and (ii) if he will conduct similar research into the potential for job creation in Northern Ireland. (AQW 6485/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am aware of the May 2003 report, commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund, "A Smart, Successful, Sustainable Scotland – The Potential for Green Enterprise and Green Jobs."

There are no plans at present to commission similar research. However, my Department has recently commissioned analysis to assess the opportunities and challenges faced by businesses in responding to the carbon emission targets contained in the Sustainable Development Strategy. The research is underway and a final report is due in Autumn 2008.

The DETI Research Agenda (2008 – 2011) is also being developed. As part of that exercise, consideration will be given to research proposals which are closely aligned with the three DETI priorities identified in the Programme for Government, namely, productivity growth, increasing employment and tourism.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of working days lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6502/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Working days lost by DETI due to stress-related absences in each of the last 24 months (May 2006 – April 2008)

MAY 06	JUN 06	JUL 06	AUG 06	SEP 06	OCT 06	NOV 06	DEC 06	JAN 07	FEB 07	MAR 07	APR 07
45	35 (44)	35 (22)	55 (44)	93 (42)	165 (4)	106	48 (9)	42 (22)	24 (17)	47 (5)	48 (19)

MAY 07	JUN 07	JUL 07	AUG 07	SEP 07	OCT 07	NOV 07	DEC 07	JAN 08	FEB 08	MAR 08	APR 08
20 (7)	11	52	66	44 (9)	56 (13)	68	54	48 (29)	37 (27)	41 (14)	29

Note: Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland figures shown in brackets

Visitors to Northern Ireland

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the percentage change in the number of visitors to Northern Ireland, broken down by purpose of visit, for each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6529/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The percentage change in the number of visitors to Northern Ireland, broken down by purpose of visit, for each of the last 10 years is as follows:

% Change on Previous Year	Visiting Friends and Relatives:	Holiday/Leisure/ Recreation:	Business:	Other:	Total:
2007*	+4%	+26%	-6%	+9%	+6%
2006	-5%	+12%	+5%	-14%	0%
2005	+12%	-8%	-8%	-23%	0%
2004	+1%	+14%	+2%	+12%	+5%
2003	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2002	+6%	+4%	+3%	-5%	+7%
2001	+4.0	-10%	+8%	-19%	+2%
2000	+9%	0	-7%	-4%	0%
1999	+11%	+10%	+15%	+11%	+12%
1998	+7%	+5%	+4%	+5%	+4%

Please note a change in survey methodology occurred in 2005. 2003 and 2004 figures have been revised for comparison purposes. Due to this and other methodological changes 2003 – 2007 figures are not directly comparable with data pre 2003.

* Final year figures are not yet available for 2007 and therefore the 2007 estimates are provisional.

Domestic Tourism

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage change, in the number of domestic tourists visiting within Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6530/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The number and percentage change in the number of domestic tourists visiting within Northern Ireland in the last 10 years is as follows:

Year:	Total Domestic Trips (millions):	% Change on Previous Year:
2007	1.15	-15%
2006	1.35	-3%
2005	1.39	+23%
2004	1.13	-10%
2003	1.25	-10%
2002	1.39	+6%
2001	1.31	-10%
2000	1.45	-16%
1999	1.73	+302%
1998	0.43	-23%

A change in the methodology of the United Kingdom Tourism Survey, which measures domestic tourism, occurred in 2005. Domestic data from 2005 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years' data.

Visitors to Northern Ireland

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage change, in the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6532/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The number and percentage change in the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland in the last 10 years is as follows:

Year:	Number of Tourists:	% Change on Previous Year:
2007*	2,090,000	+6%
2006	1,979,000	0%
2005	1,972,000	0%
2004	1,985,000	+5%
2003	1,896,000	+17%

Year:	Number of Tourists:	% Change on Previous Year:
2002	1,615,000	+7%
2001	1,511,000	+2%
2000	1,480,000	-
1999	1,655,000	+12%
1998	1,477,000	+4%

A change in survey methodology occurred in 2005. Figures for 2000 – 2004 have been revised for comparison purposes. Data pre-2000 cannot be revised and is therefore not directly comparable.

* Final year figures are not yet available for 2007 and therefore the 2007 estimates are provisional.

Visitors to Northern Ireland

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage change, in the number of international tourists visiting Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6533/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The number; and percentage change in the number of international tourists visiting Northern Ireland in the last 10 years is as follows:

Year:	Number of International Tourists:	% Change on Previous Year:
2007*	500,000	+19%
2006	421,000	+7%
2005	392,000	+21%
2004	325,000	+11%
2003	294,000	+17%
2002	251,000	-3%
2001	258,000	-24%
2000	341,000	+27%
1999	269,000	-4%
1998	279,000	+3%

* Final year figures are not yet available for 2007 and therefore the 2007 estimates are provisional.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the websites that come under his Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6548/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Information concerning the websites that come under my Department's responsibility, including the cost of maintaining them and number of visitors to these sites, since devolution, is detailed in the following table.

Owner	Website	Description	Cost	Number of Visits
DETI	www.detini.gov.uk	Central DETI website	£ 11,900	2.8 million (approx)
Invest NI	www.investni.com	Central Invest NI website	£ 46,396	1,092,719
Invest NI	www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk	Website aimed at giving practical advice to NI Businesses	£ 56,000	781,803
Invest NI	www.sabp.co.uk	Information on the Start A Business Programme run by Invest NI	£ 30 801	80,327
General Consumer Council	www.consumerCouncil.org.uk	Central Consumer Council Website	£ 3,783	193,926
General Consumer Council	www.consumerline.org	A resource for consumer advice in NI	£ 1,410	256,637
Health and Safety Executive NI	www.hseni.gov.uk	Central HSENI website	¹ Notional cost	101,871
Health and Safety Executive NI	www.workingforhealthni.gov.uk	Working for Health website run by HSENI	£ 8,025	3,594
NI Tourist Board	www.nitb.com	A tourism industry website delivering tourism news and business intelligence.	£ 237,000	1.5 million (approx)
NI Tourist Board	www.discovernorthernireland.com	A consumer website, which delivers tourism information and provides consumers with the opportunity to make accommodation reservations.		
NI Tourist Board	www.tidinet.com	A tourism industry extranet for accommodation providers to maintain data and to manage online reservations.		
NI Tourist Board	www.tiditic.com	A website which provides local authorities with a system to administer accommodation reservations.		
NI Tourist Board	www.tididata.com	Delivers a web services interface for the provision of data exchange between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and its industry partners which includes Tourism Ireland.		
NI Tourist Board	medialibrary.nitb.net/public	A photographic library permitting industry and stakeholders with the opportunity to review and select Northern Ireland imagery.		
Geological Survey for NI	www.bgs.ac.uk/gsni/	Central GSNI website	Site is hosted and maintained by the British Geological Survey at no cost to DETI	22,221

¹ In 2007/08 there was a notional cost of £22,000 spread across all eleven departments for all websites hosted by Dept of Finance and Personnel – this included HSENI's website and the Working for Health website. It is not possible to give a separate notional cost attributable to each of the two sites which it maintains.

Pump Water Storage System at Camlough

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of his Department's commitment to increase the amount of energy obtained from renewable sources, to confirm if he will re-examine the Pump Water Storage system at Camlough. (AQW 6573/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The lands at Camlough, South Armagh, were vested in the early 1970's to facilitate the intended development by the former Electricity Board for Northern Ireland of a pump storage electricity generation project. Compensation was paid to various land owners at the time, based on the assessed open market value of the lands.

The pump storage system at Camlough did not proceed primarily because of the political/security situation in South Armagh during the 1970's and 1980's. Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) was given a formal consent by the Regulator on 29 September 1997 to dispose of the vested lands in accordance with a formal disposal strategy, and the majority of it has been sold. In addition, NIE has sold off the major plant items that were to be employed in the facility.

New Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the advanced stage in the development plans for the new hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen, to detail the work that has been carried out by his Department with construction and engineering companies in (i) the South West; and (ii) the West, to prepare these companies for the opportunities that will arise in the building of these new hospitals. (AQW 6579/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI provides information on an ongoing basis to client companies regarding opportunities arising from Olympics 2012, the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and the National Development Plan. In addition we are encouraging clients to exploit opportunities arising from the sustainability agenda, by supporting their research and development activities.

Invest NI support is directed at encouraging clients to strive for continuous improvement, including

improving areas such as supply chain management, strategic management, marketing activities and process improvement.

The aim of our work with such clients is to improve the overall competitiveness of their offering with particular reference to the ability to compete in markets external to Northern Ireland.

Invest NI are liaising with a number of the final bidders in relation to these specific contracts with a view to facilitating a supply chain initiative in September 2008.

Employee Jobs by Industry

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the specific industry sectors that have declined in the last 2 years in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6624/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of the number of employee jobs below Northern Ireland level are only available from the Census of Employment on a biennial basis and the most up-to-date figures relate to September 2005.

Estimates of the number of employee jobs by industry section at September 2003 and September 2005 and the change over this period for East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area can be found in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE JOBS¹ BY INDUSTRY SECTION IN EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA AT SEPTEMBER 2003 AND SEPTEMBER 2005, CHANGE AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE

Industry Section Description	Section (SIC 2003)	September 2003	September 2005	Change 2003-2005	% Change 2003-2005
Agriculture ¹ , Hunting & Forestry	A	*	*	*	*
Fishing	B	*	*	*	*
Mining & Quarrying	C	*	*	*	*
Manufacturing	D	3,646	4,010	364	10.0%
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	E	290	239	-51	-17.6%
Construction	F	643	661	18	2.8%
Wholesale & Retail Trade; Repairs	G	3,117	3,178	61	2.0%
Hotels & Restaurants	H	1,533	1,510	-23	-1.5%
Transport, Storage & Communication	I	1,386	1,257	-129	-9.3%
Financial Intermediation	J	380	441	61	16.1%
Real Estate, Renting & Business Activities	K	803	872	69	8.6%
Public Administration & Defence	L	1,066	984	-82	-7.7%
Education	M	3,968	4,277	309	7.8%

Industry Section Description	Section (SIC 2003)	September 2003	September 2005	Change 2003-2005	% Change 2003-2005
Health & Social Work	N	2,292	2,368	76	3.3%
Other Services	O	1,155	1,154	-1	-0.1%
Services	G-O	15,700	16,041	341	2.2%
Total	A-O	20,437	21,131	694	3.4%

* Not shown due to either no employees or confidentiality constraints

1 Figures exclude agriculture but include animal husbandry service activities and hunting, trapping and game propagation.

Industry in East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the specific industry sectors that are identified as having (i) growth potential; and (ii) new introduction potential, for the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6626/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI works with those Northern Ireland businesses in the manufacturing and tradeable services industry sectors that demonstrate the greatest potential for growth through increasing exports and improving productivity by becoming more internationally competitive.

With regards to the East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency, Invest NI is working with a significant number of clients operating in the advanced manufacturing, specialist engineering, life sciences and ICT sectors. In the period 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2007, Invest NI provided nearly £41m of assistance to them to undertake growth projects. This assistance leveraged gross investment of over £142m.

In addition to enhancing the competitiveness of existing businesses, Invest NI also seeks to attract value-added foreign direct investment (FDI) in higher productivity sectors to Northern Ireland. The East Antrim constituency, in common with the rest of Northern Ireland, has a number of key selling points that makes the region attractive to inward investors, particularly, though not exclusively, those operating in the ICT, Business Services and Financial Services Sectors. These key selling points include a highly educated workforce, competitive operating costs, advanced telecoms infrastructure, excellent university / business linkages and a pro-business environment. The attractiveness of the East Antrim constituency is demonstrated by the fact that the region secured 7 FDI projects between 1st April 2002 and 31st March 2007 that promoted nearly 470 new jobs and over £62m of investment.

Invest NI works with Northern Ireland's public and private research bases to support the commercialisation of intellectual property. Specifically in relation to the East Antrim constituency, the agency has supported

large investments in R&D by the University of Ulster and FG Wilson that have the potential to deliver exciting new products, developments and opportunities in the advanced engineering and ICT sectors.

Sustainable Competitiveness Programme

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5366/08, to detail the work he will undertake to assist local councils with applications for funding through the new European Regional Development Fund Competitiveness Programme. (AQW 6675/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI officials have met with Chief Executives and Economic Development Officials across all of the 26 District Councils and have invited them to submit individual project application forms for the Local Economic Development measure of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Competitiveness Programme. Additionally, DETI has organised a series of workshops covering all Council areas to be attended by funders with a potential input to make. These workshops will enable Councils to discuss project ideas and find best fit before submitting applications.

First stage assessment documentation for local economic development proposals was issued to the 26 District Councils on 28th April 2008. This stage is intended to give applicants the opportunity to test ideas with the Department before engaging on a full application. Upon receipt, a preliminary assessment will be undertaken and guidance offered to the applicant on how to proceed.

Lough Neagh Partnership

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline his plans to further develop Lough Neagh as a tourist attraction over the next five years. (AQW 6676/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The draft Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Corporate Plan 2008-2011 identifies a number

of tourism product portfolios. There will be an opportunity for bodies, including the Lough Neagh Partnership, to bid for delivery of elements from within these product portfolios to address the provision of unique Northern Ireland product to sell within the marketplace.

Lough Neagh currently features in marketing activity undertaken by the NITB and Tourism Ireland (TIL) which is driven through websites, publications and targeted campaigns to promote tourism growth to Northern Ireland.

Partnership is clearly the best way forward for successful tourism development and delivery. Within this context the Lough Neagh Partnership has played a leading role in the Lough's development. DETI and its agencies will continue to work with relevant partners to ensure continued progress in the development of Lough Neagh.

I understand that under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2001-2006 the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has provided £3.2m towards the implementation of a Lough Neagh Strategy managed by the Lough Neagh Partnership. The new programme will provide further opportunities for developments around Lough Neagh.

In addition, the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure has worked in partnership with local authorities and others to develop the Lough's water-based leisure potential, including grant aiding a number of projects around its shoreline, for example refurbishing the Maid of Antrim and the Blackwater and Lough Neagh Canoe Trails.

Tourist Board Promotion

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans to increase the number of tourists from (a) the rest of the United Kingdom; (b) the Republic of Ireland; (c) the European Union; and (d) the rest of the world, to tourist attractions at Lough Neagh. (AQW 6677/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland in the Irish Republic. It employs websites, publications, targeted campaigns and its Tourism Information Centre and office in Dublin to promote tourism growth in Northern Ireland as a whole. Lough Neagh and its attractions are included in these marketing formats. Information on Lough Neagh is also available from partner organisations and their websites such as the Regional Tourism Partnerships and the Lough Neagh Partnership and the Countryside Access and Activities Network.

NITB campaigns in the Irish Republic are planned for the summer and autumn.

Tourism Ireland (TIL) features information on Lough Neagh and its hinterland in its suite of publications, and websites, which are made available for potential visitors in GB and all major markets overseas.

The area features in a number of sections of TIL's 36 international websites as a centre for watersports, coarse and game fishing, birdwatching, equestrian activities, golf, cycling and for more general leisure pursuits such as walking, boating and cruising, and for accommodation, restaurants and things to do and see.

The TIL Coarse Angling guide, produced in cooperation with the NITB, shows the fishery at Portglenone on its cover. It is published in four language versions for overseas distribution. Lough Neagh also features in TIL's Walking and Cycling Guides.

Lough Neagh features in TIL's Food Guide which was launched by Paul Rankin at the BBC Good Food Show last November at the NEC in Birmingham. Famous Lough Neagh eels are among the highlights included in the guide.

Lough Neagh, Ardboe and St Colman's Monastery feature in Tourism Ireland's new Car Touring guide which was published in April for distribution in Great Britain and other markets.

Long-Term Unemployment Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of long-term unemployed (i) in total; and (ii) as a proportion of all unemployed people, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6734/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The numbers of long-term unemployed claimants (i) in total and (ii) expressed as a proportion of all claimants in each of the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Constituencies at April 2008 are provided in the table below.

Parliamentary Constituency	Long-Term Claimant Count Unemployed	Proportion of all Claimant Count Unemployed
Belfast East	120	13.7
Belfast North	355	18.7
Belfast South	255	20.6
Belfast West	690	24.3
East Antrim	155	13.6

Parliamentary Constituency	Long-Term Claimant Count Unemployed	Proportion of all Claimant Count Unemployed
East Londonderry	195	13.4
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	205	18.3
Foyle	530	19.1
Lagan Valley	105	12.4
Mid Ulster	85	10.8
Newry & Armagh	210	15.7
North Antrim	195	14.9
North Down	135	16.0
South Antrim	155	16.4
South Down	155	12.7
Strangford	155	16.9
Upper Bann	130	9.6
West Tyrone	310	18.7
Northern Ireland	4,150	16.8

All figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and therefore do not sum to Northern Ireland total.

Growth in Industry Sectors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the specific industry sectors that are identified as having (i) growth potential; and (ii) new introduction potential, for the North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6820/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI works with those Northern Ireland businesses in the manufacturing and tradeable services industry sectors that demonstrate the greatest potential for growth through increasing exports and improving productivity, regardless of their location.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE JOBS¹ BY INDUSTRY SECTION IN NORTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA AT SEPTEMBER 2003 AND SEPTEMBER 2005, CHANGE AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE

Industry Section Description	Section (SIC 2003)	September 2003	September 2005	Change 2003-2005	% Change 2003-2005
Agriculture ¹ , Hunting & Forestry	A	*	*	*	*
Fishing	B	*	*	*	*
Mining & Quarrying	C	*	*	*	*
Manufacturing	D	1,995	1,637	-358	-17.9%
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	E	*	*	*	*
Construction	F	862	894	32	3.7%
Wholesale & Retail Trade; Repairs	G	5,065	5,421	356	7.0%

(i) Invest NI is working with a significant number of clients operating in the advanced manufacturing, specialist engineering, business services and ICT sectors. In the North Down Constituency, in the period 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2007, it provided over £12 million of financial assistance to them to undertake growth projects. This assistance leveraged planned investment of nearly £47million.

(ii) Invest NI also seeks to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in higher productivity sectors to Northern Ireland. The constituency has a number of selling points that makes its attractive to inward investors, particularly, though not exclusively, those operating in the ICT, Business Services and Financial Services Sectors. These include a highly educated workforce, competitive operating costs, advanced telecoms infrastructure, and a pro-business environment. The attractiveness of the constituency is demonstrated by the fact that 5 FDI projects located there between 1st April 2002 and 31st March 2007, promoting 614 new jobs and leveraging planned investment of £12 million.

Industry Sector Employment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the specific industry sectors that have declined in the last five years in the North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6821/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of the number of employee jobs below Northern Ireland level are only available from the Census of Employment on a biennial basis and the most up-to-date figures relate to September 2005.

Estimates of the number of employee jobs by industry section at September 2003 and September 2005 and the change over this period for North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area can be found in Table 1 below.

Industry Section Description	Section (SIC 2003)	September 2003	September 2005	Change 2003-2005	% Change 2003-2005
Hotels & Restaurants	H	2,321	2,401	80	3.4%
Transport, Storage & Communication	I	543	495	-48	-8.8%
Financial Intermediation	J	447	418	-29	-6.5%
Real Estate, Renting & Business Activities	K	1,626	1,995	369	22.7%
Public Administration & Defence	L	2,374	2,346	-28	-1.2%
Education	M	2,299	2,607	308	13.4%
Health & Social Work	N	3,404	3,578	174	5.1%
Other Services	O	1,517	1,542	25	1.6%
Services	G-O	19,596	20,803	1,207	6.2%
Total¹	A-O	22,575	23,386	811	3.6%

* Not shown due to either no employees or confidentiality constraints

1 Figures exclude agriculture but include animal husbandry service activities and hunting, trapping and game propagation.

Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6333/08, to detail the reasons why the Foyle constituency is not designated as an area for potential investment in the (i) bioscience; and (ii) pharmaceutical industries. (AQW 6837/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Life Sciences sector which includes the Bioscience and Pharmaceutical sectors has been identified and targeted as a priority sector by Invest NI in line with the Regional Innovation Strategy. From a strategic perspective Invest NI is actively engaging with and supporting Life Sciences proposals from across all of Northern Ireland and has not therefore designated any individual constituencies as specialist areas. The Northern Ireland region is well placed to benefit from further strategic investment in this sector as it includes a number of companies operating on a global basis, two leading universities undertaking cutting edge research and has a highly skilled workforce.

I would like to assure you that Invest NI continues to actively work with existing and potential investors in the Bioscience and Pharmaceutical sectors to develop projects which have clear growth potential in international markets. Indeed, there has been significant recent investment in the Life Sciences sector. Invest NI has offered £41 million over the last four years in support of Life Sciences projects, stimulating total investment of £205 million. This Invest NI support includes £5.3m assistance towards a £18m investment in a new 120,000 sq ft factory by Perfecseal, one of the leading global suppliers of

sterile packaging materials to the healthcare industry. Perfecseal which, is based in the Foyle constituency, currently employs approximately 265 staff and this includes more than 50 new jobs created to date as a result of this investment. There are also a number of significant Life Sciences projects under appraisal that will further contribute to the development of this sector in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI has also supported companies, universities and the R&D office of the DHSSPS, to attend major exhibitions in the US and Europe and has also appointed a specialist Life Sciences Consultant to generate inward investment from North America, focused on high potential start-ups. Invest NI will again be taking 12 Northern Ireland Life Sciences companies and research centres to exhibit at the International Bio exhibition being held in San Diego in June 2008. This is the largest global exhibition and conference for the bio-science and pharmaceutical sectors.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the amount of funding available to businesses through the Small Firms Loan Guarantee scheme in each of the last five years; (ii) the amount of funding drawn down by businesses from the scheme in each of the last five years; and (iii) the steps he is taking to promote take-up of the scheme. (AQW 6846/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Small Firms Loan Guarantee (SFLG) scheme is a UK-wide initiative administered by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

(BERR), which underwrites loans made by banks and other lenders to businesses under the conditions of the Scheme.

There is no set amount of funding available to businesses through the SFLG scheme but BERR places an annual ceiling on the maximum level of lending possible, applied in the form of a lending limit allocated to each lender.

The amount drawn down by Northern Ireland businesses in the period 2003/04 to 2007/08 is as follows:

Year	Amount £'000
2007/08	Not yet available
2006/07	3,374
2005/06	1,285
2004/05	4,032
2003/04	3,704

Invest NI continues to actively promote the SFLGS as a potential source of commercial funding. Start-up businesses that might avail of the scheme are made aware of it when they approach Invest NI for support and, as part of its routine negotiation process, Invest NI encourages its existing clients to look at all types of appropriate funding, including banking products and sources of private equity.

Export-Orientated Small Firms

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the assistance and support provided by Invest NI to export-oriented small firms; and (ii) the level of assistance that has been provided to such firms in the past five years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6847/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI focuses on working with those

manufacturing and tradable service businesses that demonstrate the greatest export potential and the prospect of improving productivity by becoming more internationally competitive. To qualify for Invest NI assistance or support, a business must demonstrate that currently, or over the following three years, they will:

- Have total sales of over £100,000 per annum;
- Have sales outside of NI greater than 25 per cent of turnover, or greater than £250,000 per annum; and,
- Be capable of and willing to work with Invest NI.

For locally-owned businesses in the tradable services sector additional qualifying criteria are:

- Have the potential to sustain salaries above the Northern Ireland Private Sector median; and/or,
- A minimum gross profit margin of 20 per cent shown to be achievable.

A qualifying business will have access to all aspects of Invest NI's extensive Business Development Solutions portfolio consisting of professional advice, assistance (financial and non-financial) and support for businesses across the following 6 key areas:

- Strategy Development;
- People Development;
- Research and Development;
- Exporting;
- Energy Management; and
- E-Business.

A copy of the Invest NI Business Development Solutions brochure can be obtained from the Publications Section on Invest NI's website at http://www.investni.com/bds_brochure_march_06.pdf.

The level of assistance that has been provided to small firms in the five year period ended 31st March 2007, broken down by parliamentary constituency, is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1
INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO INDIGENOUS COMPANIES WITH LESS THAN 50 EMPLOYEES (SMALL & MICRO) BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (2002/03 – 2006/07)

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2002/03		2003/04		2004/05	
	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)
Belfast East	0.75	2.64	1.59	3.99	0.87	2.97
Belfast North	1.09	4.66	1.05	2.89	0.97	2.56
Belfast South	1.00	3.21	4.12	14.55	2.74	8.50

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2002/03		2003/04		2004/05	
	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)
Belfast West	0.76	1.80	0.86	4.67	0.71	3.03
East Antrim	0.67	2.25	1.64	4.12	2.02	7.25
East Londonderry	0.46	1.98	0.50	1.29	0.88	3.06
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1.26	7.77	1.55	8.22	1.79	5.73
Foyle	1.43	6.48	1.75	6.22	1.76	5.00
Lagan Valley	0.52	2.60	0.71	2.79	1.81	8.14
Mid Ulster	1.67	7.30	1.83	6.90	2.48	9.87
Newry and Armagh	1.04	6.68	1.26	5.32	1.61	6.66
North Antrim	0.70	5.26	1.35	8.19	1.32	4.69
North Down	0.23	0.58	2.79	9.77	0.66	2.64
South Antrim	0.59	1.82	1.31	3.17	1.29	5.28
South Down	0.64	4.33	0.63	2.72	0.97	4.78
Strangford	0.61	3.61	0.92	3.51	0.76	4.59
Upper Bann	0.79	3.62	1.77	7.12	1.40	3.93
West Tyrone	0.82	3.82	3.44	20.01	0.89	3.25
Total	15.03	70.41	29.08	115.45	24.92	91.93

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2005/06		2006/07		TOTAL	
	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)
Belfast East	1.85	7.68	1.01	5.19	6.06	22.46
Belfast North	1.06	5.00	0.76	5.52	4.92	20.62
Belfast South	1.93	7.35	0.88	4.32	10.67	37.93
Belfast West	0.62	1.99	0.32	1.07	3.27	12.55
East Antrim	0.53	2.50	1.13	6.54	5.99	22.66
East Londonderry	0.52	3.27	0.84	4.48	3.20	14.08
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1.03	3.86	2.03	14.59	7.67	40.17
Foyle	1.18	4.52	1.16	6.21	7.28	28.42
Lagan Valley	0.82	3.46	1.99	11.95	5.86	28.93
Mid Ulster	1.41	5.94	1.49	6.90	8.88	36.91
Newry and Armagh	0.88	5.38	1.12	5.07	5.91	29.10
North Antrim	0.37	2.79	2.63	11.15	6.36	32.09
North Down	0.62	3.01	0.33	1.73	4.63	17.73
South Antrim	1.01	6.64	0.61	3.33	4.80	20.25
South Down	0.79	3.21	0.74	3.65	3.77	18.68
Strangford	0.90	3.75	0.57	1.60	3.76	17.06
Upper Bann	0.42	1.55	1.31	16.76	5.69	32.98

Parliamentary Constituency Area	2005/06		2006/07		TOTAL	
	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)	Assistance Offered (£m)	Planned Investment (£m)
West Tyrone	0.98	4.15	0.87	7.21	7.00	38.43
Total	16.91	76.02	19.79	117.26	105.72	471.07

Notes:

1. Table totals may not add due to rounding.
2. Planned Investment includes Assistance Offered.

Energy Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the steps he is taking to ensure that high energy costs, in comparison to neighbouring countries, are not an obstacle to competitiveness. (AQO 3357/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Due to the recent steep rises in global wholesale oil and gas prices, energy costs in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, have been increasing. This is unwelcome news for business and domestic consumers alike. My Department, along with the Utility Regulator, will continue to facilitate market arrangements such as the Single Electricity Market that bring downward pressure on energy prices and so reduce barriers to competitiveness.

Eco-Tourist Activities

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of people employed in eco-tourist activities. (AQO 3393/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Information on the total number of people employed in eco-tourism is not available.

Green Tourism, of which eco-tourism is an important part, is one of the fastest growing niche markets in global tourism. Northern Ireland is already tapping into this market, which draws visitors to destinations which offer genuine and authentic experiences.

Examples of the pro-active approach being taken to Green Tourism in Northern Ireland include the roles of the Causeway Coast & Glens and Mourne Heritage Trusts in terms of conservation and environmental management; and Fermanagh's participation in the Greenbox cross-border initiative, a genuine eco-tourism destination with a set of standards based on sound environmental practices, highlighting all that this cross-border region and its people has to offer.

The success of Green Box in developing Green Tourism was recognised in its nomination for the 'Destination' Category in the World Tourism and

Travel Council 'Tourism for Tomorrow' Awards in May 2007 in Lisbon, Portugal, where it finished as runner up in the category won by no less prestigious an attraction than the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

Renewable Energy

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans to increase the amount of electricity that is generated from renewable sources. (AQO 3439/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) is our main mechanism for encouraging renewable electricity generation. Renewables generation, particularly wind, in Northern Ireland has increased by some 60% since the introduction of the NIRO in 2005 and currently represents 5% of total consumption. This equates to 441 Gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity generated during the year to 31 March 2008.

Current proposals for reform of the NIRO – so-called “banding” proposals – would give relatively more support to emerging technologies such as tidal power and would further encourage renewables generation from non-wind sources. A consultation on amending legislation will issue within the next few months.

In terms of emerging technologies, DETI has appointed consultants to assess the potential for the sustainable development of the bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland. I have also recently agreed a work programme which will lead to the development of an offshore wind and marine renewable energy strategic action plan.

Northern Ireland's current renewable energy target is that, by 2012, 12% of total electricity consumption will be met from indigenous renewable energy sources.

New Jobs in West Belfast and Shankill Areas

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs that have been created in West Belfast and the greater Shankill since 8 May 2007. (AQO 3406/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

In answering this question I refer only to the job promotion activities of Invest NI.

Since May 2007, Invest NI has continued to work closely with its client-base within the area defined by the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforce to identify and support development projects that promote export-led growth and improve business productivity.

Provisional results show that in the period from 8th May 2007 to 30th April 2008, Invest NI offered £1.4m in support of business development projects that will lever £7.2 million in investment commitments. Whilst not all projects are directly employment related, those that are promoted 147 new jobs. An additional 189 jobs are also expected to be created by local start-ups supported under the Start a Business Programme.

There is increasing evidence that tradeable services investment, which currently forms the majority of inward investment successes, is increasingly being attracted to city centre locations. Such locations offer access to a large and skilled labour pool, are within a reasonable travel to work area and are supported by the necessary infrastructure such as good transportation linkages and access to a range of economic and leisure amenities.

Recent inward-investment projects of this type, by companies such as Bank of Ireland, 3ParData, Firstsource Solutions and Citibank, although largely city centre-based, are in close proximity to the West Belfast and Greater Shankill areas and clearly offer employment opportunities to those living in all parts of the city and beyond.

Sports and Tourism

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the current, and potential, impact of sporting events on tourism. (AQO 3349/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Sporting events have the potential to attract visiting participants and spectators, thereby generating increased visitor revenue to the economy. They can also generate positive PR through word of mouth and through print, radio and television advertising. The annual Milk Cup tournament which takes place in July and August is an example of how the best of Northern Ireland can be put on show to visitors from five continents.

Maximising the tourism potential of sporting events in Northern Ireland involves co-operation by a range of partners. In particular, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has been developing, in partnership

with Sport Northern Ireland, a new 10-year Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland. The contribution of sport generally, including sports matches and tournaments, to tourism has emerged as an important issue in the development of the Strategy. A final Strategy will be launched shortly.

Pre-Enterprise Initiatives

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans to support pre-enterprise initiatives. (AQO 3431/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Invest NI supports a range of pre-enterprise initiatives targeted at young people, women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within the Higher Education sector, the agency provides funding to the Northern Ireland Centre for Entrepreneurship. As a partnership between the two universities, Northern Ireland Centre for Entrepreneurship has embedded entrepreneurship across the Science, Engineering and Technology and non-Science, Engineering and Technology faculties.

Invest NI also sponsors the annual Global Entrepreneurship Week. This event is designed to inspire young people to embrace innovation and entrepreneurship.

The agency offers a wide range of programmes to encourage the development of seed and early-stage companies, particularly in the technology-based sector. The Energy Research and Knowledge Transfer Group, facilitated by Invest NI, supports pre-enterprise activity by bringing together representatives from companies and individual entrepreneurs to discuss new opportunities for energy related products and services. The Group has direct links to local universities, further education colleges and Invest NI business support and research and development programmes.

Invest NI's Technical Advisory Unit offers support to pre-enterprise through the Business Innovation Link programme. This can provide individuals with financial support of up to £5,000 and advice towards product ideas that are patentable and have market potential.

Renewable Energy

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of electricity being generated from renewable sources. (AQO 3469/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation is our

main mechanism for encouraging renewable electricity generation. Renewables generation, particularly wind, in Northern Ireland has increased by some 60% since the introduction of the NIRO in 2005 and currently represents 5% of total consumption. This equates to 441 Gigawatt hours of electricity generated during the year to 31 March 2008.

Current proposals for reform of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation, so-called “banding” proposals, would give relatively more support to emerging technologies such as tidal power and would further encourage renewables generation from non-wind sources. A consultation on amending legislation will issue within the next few months.

In terms of emerging technologies, DETI has appointed consultants to assess the potential for the sustainable development of the bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland. I have also recently agreed a work programme which will lead to the development of an offshore wind and marine renewable energy strategic action plan.

Northern Ireland’s current renewable energy target is that, by 2012, 12% of total electricity consumption will be met from indigenous renewable energy sources.

Regional Tourism Partnerships

Mrs O’Neill asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the support that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is providing to the regional tourism partnerships. (AQO 3421/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has discussed core service level agreements with all four of the Regional Tourism Partnerships. These will cover services required by NITB in support of key priorities and objectives and funding for 2008 to 2009. Arrangements for subsequent years will be the subject of further discussion.

In addition, a fund of £2 million per annum is being established to support the key areas of product development proposed in NITB’s draft Corporate Plan covering the period 2008 to 2011. RTPs will be able to bid for additional funds from this source.

Local SMEs: Incentives

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give a commitment that local entrepreneurs will receive the same economic incentives to grow their businesses that will be afforded to potential foreign investors who attend the forthcoming Economic Investment conference. (AQO 3466/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Northern Ireland economy will improve and prosper by increasing the number and quality of businesses with sufficient scale to compete globally. Invest NI can contribute to the achievement of this goal by encouraging its clients, most of which are locally-owned Small and Medium Enterprises, to realise their full potential.

To this end, Invest NI will work with manufacturing and tradeable service businesses in Northern Ireland with the potential to improve productivity and become more internationally competitive. The agency is strongly committed to work with its locally-owned clients to encourage the achievement of challenging targets in relation to export growth, business expenditure in Research and Development, and increased and higher salary levels.

Between 2002 and 2007, Invest NI offered £631m of assistance to stimulate over £2.6 billion of business-related investment in the Northern Ireland economy. Almost 54% of this assistance related to its locally-owned clients.

Preliminary results for 2007/08 indicate that the agency has secured a further £692 million of investment commitments, 54% of which again is in support of locally-owned businesses. The vast majority of the agency’s offers, almost 1,500 in total, were for less than £10,000 and most of these were to locally-owned SMEs. Within this, Invest NI’s Regional Office Network saw a 52% increase in the number of offers approved compared to 2006/07.

This high level of activity signals the increasing ambition of Invest NI’s locally-owned SME clients to achieve the scale necessary to compete effectively in global markets.

Corporation Tax Review

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contingency plans he has to promote indigenous business growth, given that the Varney Review has not allowed for lower corporation tax in Northern Ireland. (AQO 3429/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I was disappointed that Sir David Varney was not persuaded on the merits of a lower rate of corporation tax, although his conclusion on this matter was not unexpected.

The second Varney review has identified removing the barriers to business growth as a key way to improve the local economy. As with many of the recommendations, we are already working to achieve this. In particular, my Department has, and will continue to target

investment to increase innovation and exports, and improve energy and telecoms infrastructure.

Furthermore, between 2002 and 2007, Invest NI offered £631m of assistance to stimulate over £2.6 billion of business-related investment in the Northern Ireland economy. Almost 54% of the assistance was directed toward locally owned businesses.

DETI remains committed to promoting enterprise locally and attracting Foreign Direct Investment, which will provide further business opportunities for the local private sector in the future.

NI and ROI Economy

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of how the economy compares to that of the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 3434/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Comparisons with the Irish Republic are not particularly valid, as it has access to a broader range of economic levers, including control over fiscal policy.

It is well known that the Irish Republic has been one of the strongest performing EU economies for a number of years. However, it is starting to feel the impact of the global economic slowdown. For example, the Economic and Social Research Institute expects growth in the Irish Republic to slow to 1.8% in 2008. This is the lowest rate since the early 1990s, and is lower than the growth forecast for Northern Ireland in 2008 (estimated by Oxford Economics to be 2.4%).

Furthermore, the unemployment rate in the Irish Republic has been increasing over recent months and is now higher than that in Northern Ireland (Irish Republic – 5.0% for December 2007 to February 2008; Northern Ireland – 4.2% for the same period).

Tourism

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the action his Department and tourist agencies are taking to market the tourist potential of the Northern Ireland soccer team. (AQO 3347/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Tourism Ireland has used international home and away soccer fixtures as opportunities to showcase Northern Ireland and to generate media interest in key European markets.

For example, Tourism Ireland, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, generated positive media coverage by facilitating visits to Northern Ireland by Swedish and Danish journalists who attended the Euro 2008 qualifying matches. These

matches were used as part of broader itineraries which showcased Northern Ireland's varied tourism product.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to make a statement on the impact of planning circular PC 03/07 on applications for apartments and other high density developments. (AQW 6078/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): It is not possible to measure directly the impact of PC 03/07, on applications for apartments and other high density developments, which provides the basis for the assessment of all such planning applications, including those which are approved and others which are refused. Good quality developments, which meet the policy requirements, are approved whilst those which do not are either amended during processing of the application, to comply with the requirements of the circular, or refused if they fail to meet the relevant policy tests.

In the consideration of these applications Planning Service ensures that they are assessed against all existing and emerging plans and policies and all other material considerations; applications may be either approved or refused for a variety of reasons including those matters referred to specifically in PC 03/07.

Planning Service development control staff are fully aware of the contents of planning circular PC 03/07 and use this in the assessment of applications for apartments and other high density developments.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the anticipated running costs for an Environmental Protection Agency. (AQW 6301/08)

The Minister of the Environment: If an independent Environmental Protection Agency were to be established, additional costs would arise from running and servicing a Board and from running the Agency as a separate legal entity. At today's prices, it is estimated that it would cost an additional £350,000 per annum for a new Board and supporting staff and an additional £250,000 per annum for additional administrative and scientific staff in core DOE. Additional costs are likely to arise from diseconomies of scale and the need to buy in services which are currently provided by the Department.

In addition to these extra recurring costs it is estimated that the non-recurring costs of setting up the Agency could amount to £2.5m.

Driving License Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people who have been waiting for at least (i) three months; (ii) four months; (iii) five months; and (iv) six or more months, to have their driving licences renewed or sent back to them from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. (AQW 6456/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As at 1 May 2008 no ordinary driving licence applications were waiting more than 3 months and DVA was meeting its target of dispatching 94% of all licences within 10 working days.

For those applications where a medical condition had been declared there were 854 outstanding for more than 3 months. The 854 cannot be broken down into the categories requested without disproportionate costs.

Medical applications require referral to the DVA's medical advisers and usually further referral to the applicants GP and /or consultant for further information.

Some cases will require more than one referral for medical information. DVA has no control over the response times from GPs and consultants.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of working days lost by her Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6503/08)

The Minister of the Environment: From 1 May 2006 to 30 April 2007 3,876 working days were lost by the Department due to stress-related illnesses.

From 1 May 2007 to 30 April 2008 4,794 working days were lost by the Department due to stress-related illnesses.

New Councils

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the new powers she is proposing to give the 11 new councils. (AQW 6525/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The new powers were set out in my Statement to the Assembly on 31 March 2008.

Redundancies and Pension Rights

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm if her department carried out any research into (i) the number of potential job losses; and (ii) the cost to the Exchequer in redundancies and pension rights, in relation to her decision to adopt model 11(b). (AQW 6571/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I indicated in my Statement to the Assembly on 31 March the reform package that will be implemented is fundamentally different from that announced by the previous administration. In this context my officials are working closely with colleagues in DFP, with the Departments transferring functions and with local government to develop a robust cost / benefit model for the programme, taking account of the analysis of service delivery options.

Reduction of Councils

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the proposed savings which will be made as a result of adopting model 11(b) for the reform of local government. (AQW 6572/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I indicated to the Assembly on 31 March, when I set out the future shape of local government, I expect the savings from the reduction in the number of Councils to be at least in the order of £15 million a year.

Scottish Marine Bill

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to give her assessment of the Scottish Marine Bill that will extend warranty on the United Nations Law of the Sea Monitoring System to 200 miles. (AQW 6580/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Scottish Government announced its intention in June 2007 to introduce a Scottish Marine Bill and established the Sustainable Seas Task Force to take that work forward. The work of the Task Force is still ongoing and proposals for legislation have not yet emerged.

Illegal Dumping

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of cases of illegal dumping identified in each of the 26 local government districts in each of the last three years. (AQW 6593/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The details set out below relate to the number of incidents (4,004 in total) of alleged illegal waste activities reported to EHS. One site/activity may account for more than one incident.

	Year	Year	Year
Council	2005	2006	2007
Antrim	60	65	66

	Year	Year	Year
Council	2005	2006	2007
Ards	92	99	60
Armagh	74	65	49
Ballymena	32	64	56
Ballymoney	18	8	14
Banbridge	42	41	24
Belfast	58	67	83
Carrickfergus	10	26	12
Castlereagh	24	31	19
Coleraine	29	33	33
Cookstown	44	45	34
Craigavon	83	106	73
Derry City	34	43	33
Down	75	98	87
Dungannon	76	93	116
Fermanagh	51	91	64
Larne	24	31	25
Limavady	46	36	33
Lisburn	96	68	90
Magherafelt	30	39	46
Moyle	19	26	13
Newry and Mourne	90	72	79
Newtownabbey	50	51	55

	Year	Year	Year
Council	2005	2006	2007
North Down	34	16	12
Omagh	57	58	37
Strabane	80	39	52
Totals	1328	1411	1265

Emergency Planning Grant

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount of emergency planning funding given to each local council in each of the last three years. (AQW 6596/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Article 29(10) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 provides for the payment of Emergency Planning Grant by my Department to district councils. The grant, which was introduced in 2006/2007 is payable to Belfast City Council and each of four employer councils, designated under the Local Government (Employment of Group Environmental Health Staff) Order (Northern Ireland) 1994. The Local Government Emergency Management Group determines the distribution of the grant available and payments are made quarterly, in arrears.

Details of the grant allocation and payments for 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 are set out in the table below.

Environmental Health Groups	Constituent Councils	2006/2007 Grant allocation £	2006/2007 Grant Payment £	2007/2008 Grant allocation £	2007/2008 Grant Payment £
Belfast	Belfast	37,700	37,700	60,000	60,000
Northern		99,400	99,400	143,750	0
	Antrim				
	Ballymena				
	Ballymoney				
	Carrickfergus				
	Coleraine				
	Cookstown				
	Larne				
	Magherafelt				
	Moyle				
	Newtownabbey				
Southern		64,300	64,300	98,750	74,962
	Armagh				
	Banbridge				

Environmental Health Groups	Constituent Councils	2006/2007 Grant allocation £	2006/2007 Grant Payment £	2007/2008 Grant allocation £	2007/2008 Grant Payment £
Southern	Craigavon				
	Dungannon and South Tyrone				
	Newry and Mourne				
Eastern		64,300	64,300	98,750	98,750
	Ards				
	Castlereagh				
	Down				
	Lisburn				
	North Down				
Western		64,300	64,300	98,750	67,043
	Derry				
	Fermanagh				
	Limavady				
	Omagh				
	Strabane				
Totals		330,000	330,000	500,000	300,755

The balance of grant payable for 2007 / 2008 has been accrued and will be paid as soon as claims have been substantiated. My Department is working closely with the Northern Group so that their outstanding claims may be presented in such a way that will satisfy auditors.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the websites that come under her Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6605/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. The table includes the number of visits since devolution as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visits to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement.

It is not possible to provide a figure on the cost of maintaining each site as a disaggregated figure for site maintenance is not held.

Websites that come under the Department's responsibility:

Website	Visits	Page views
www.coastalmarineni.com	1,086	17,395
www.doeni.gov.uk	242,215	847,736
www.boundarycommission.org.uk	11,417	34,701
www.regni.info	30,173	92,181
www.roadsafetyni.gov.uk	154,214	411,698
www.roadsafetyni.gov.uk/education	37,542	156,320
www.ehsni.gov.uk	468,011	3,319,416
www.wakeuptowaste.org	20,117	94,250
www.kidsagainstwaste.org	4,362	25,553
www.peatlandsni.gov.uk	64,206	219,450
www.dvani.gov.uk	119,915	137,902
www.dvlni.gov.uk	1,893,180	527,348
www.planningni.gov.uk	992,525	3,517,019
www.dvtani.gov.uk	Not available	Not available

Reform of Planning System

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to explain why the Departmental press release of 29 November 2007 announcing Planning System

Reform included material contributed and directly attributed to the Construction Employees Federation. (AQW 6618/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I publicly announced my intention to take forward a comprehensive medium to long-term programme of reform for the planning system at the “Exploring the Future of Planning in Northern Ireland” conference held at the Culloden Hotel, Belfast on 29th November 2007. The press release to which you refer was issued on the day of the conference in order to highlight my announcement.

The conference was organised by BMF Business Services, a private conference firm, and was attended by a range of key stakeholders in the planning system here. The conference was sponsored by the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) and supported by Planning Service. I used the opening address at the conference to announce the reform programme and John Armstrong, Managing Director of the CEF, was also one of a number of guest speakers at the event.

There is no Departmental policy regarding the inclusion of quotes from non-governmental third parties in Departmental press releases. It is, nevertheless, a standard and widely accepted practice to include quotes from non-governmental third parties in Departmental press releases, providing that the quote is relevant. The quote provided by the CEF was clearly relevant in this instance as it referred directly to my announcement. Taking this into account and given the fact that the announcement was made at a conference which the CEF also sponsored and spoke at, it is clear that their contribution to the press release was entirely appropriate and acceptable.

Planning Applications

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the total number of planning applications applied for single dwellings in the countryside in each of 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006; and (ii) for these planning applications, the number that were for replacement dwellings. (AQW 6620/08)

The Minister of the Environment: You will recall I wrote to all Members in December 2007 advising of the new arrangements for the preparation and publication of planning statistics. The statistics for 2006/07 are available and those for the years 2002/03 and 2005/06 will be published in October 2008.

At present, I am able to provide figures for the 2006/07 financial year only. In 2006/07, Planning Service received 2,342 planning applications for single dwellings in the countryside of which 1,312 were for replacement dwellings.

Seaweed in Ards Peninsula

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the conditions in which Ards Council is permitted to remove seaweed on the eastern side of the Ards peninsula. (AQW 6643/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Environment and Heritage Service issued a notice to Ards Borough Council on 2 April 2008 in accordance with Article 39(3) of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 assenting the removal of seaweed at the five locations on the eastern side of the Ards Peninsula. The condition that was applied to the removal of seaweed from the five locations was as follows –

- Rotting seaweed may be removed from the soft, sandy areas above high water mark between 1 April 2008 and 30 September 2008, using a JCB and tractor, both fitted with agri-grip tyres, and this material may be placed below the high water mark.

Driver Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of registered driving instructors in operation. (AQW 6659/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At the end of March 2008, there were 933 registered driving instructors listed on the ADI (Approved Driving Instructors) register maintained by the Driver & Vehicle Agency.

Driver Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the safeguards afforded to registered driving instructors. (AQW 6661/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Registered driving instructors, commonly known as Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs), have the endorsement of the Department of the Environment as they undergo a three part test to assess not only their driving ability but their ability to instruct and rigorous character checks. They are issued with a certificate which they can show to prospective customers. In addition the Driver & Vehicle Agency offers instructors a facility to include their names on its website and advises customers enquiring about ADIs that they are listed on the register.

Driving Instructor Identification

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment if she has any plans to make identification of registered

driving instructors easier for prospective customers.
(AQW 6663/08)

The Minister of the Environment: New powers in the Road Traffic (NI) Order 2007 provide for the mandatory display of Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) certificates, in the vehicle in which they are instructing. These provisions will become law in the autumn. It is hoped that this will make it easier for pupils and their parents to assure themselves of the legitimacy of the instructor they have chosen and for the enforcement agencies to detect illegal instruction.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) continues to encourage ADIs to allow the Agency to post their name and contact details on its website although a majority of ADIs choose not to.

Driver Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of illegal driving instructors identified by her Department in the last two years.
(AQW 6664/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Reports of illegal instruction generally come from Driving Instructors and Driving Examiners and there have been about 20 reported cases in the last two years. However, it is difficult to substantiate these reports and separate those instructing illegally from those teaching friends and family. The illegality occurs if someone accepts payment for instruction and, despite the efforts of the Agency to gather evidence, it has proved difficult to obtain this from learner drivers. In one recent case, where there was substantial evidence, PSNI secured a conviction for illegal driving instruction.

EU Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the EU funding surrendered by her Department in each of the last 2 financial years.
(AQW 6668/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department administers environmental projects under the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme 2000-2006.

In addition, my Department, along with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Republic of Ireland, jointly administers environmental projects under Northern Ireland/ Republic of Ireland Cross-Border INTERREG IIIA Programme.

In 2006-07, Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), on behalf of the DOE, surrendered £257k reflecting a reduction in the level of anticipated grant claims expected from the two EU programmes that it manages.

In 2007-08, EHS, on behalf of the DOE, surrendered £179k.

Seaweed in Ards Peninsula

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action (i) her Department; and (ii) the Environment and Heritage Service, will take to address the problem of flies congregating on rotting seaweed on the Irish Sea side of the Ards Peninsula.
(AQW 6715/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has no responsibility regarding flies congregating on rotting seaweed on the Ards Peninsula.

Media Monitoring

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how much she has spent on media monitoring since devolution.
(AQW 6717/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has spent £9532.06 on media monitoring for the period 1 May 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Grouse Population

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) figures; and (ii) information, used to determine that the red grouse population has reduced by 60% in the last 30 years, as stated in the Northern Ireland Species Plan.
(AQW 6719/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The most up to date published figures are provided in two major atlases of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland and were used to determine that the red grouse population has reduced by 60% in the last 30 years.

Information is published in The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland by Sharrock et al., 1976 which indicates that there were 421 breeding pairs of red grouse in Ireland.

The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991 by Gibbons et al., 1993 indicates that the population had declined to 141 breeding pairs of red grouse in Ireland.

These two population estimates indicate “a decline of over 60% (in Ireland) in the last 30 years” as stated in the species action plan.

Grouse Population

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the discussions she has had with shooting organisations to determine the figures for grouse population. (AQW 6720/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland red grouse population was estimated in 2004 mainly using recognised field survey methodology.

Additional data were gathered by collating all available records of red grouse sightings provided by CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording) and NIBA (Northern Ireland Birdwatchers Association). Other records were obtained from a variety of sources including a number of private individuals. The authors of the 2004 report discussed grouse populations with a number of field sportsmen and consulted with Mr Roger Pollen, Director of BASC (The British Association for Shooting and Conservation) in Northern Ireland.

Planning Service Recruitment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6089/08, to detail the action she has taken to increase staffing levels to expedite the processing of planning applications. (AQW 6721/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service is making efforts to recruit and appoint staff to fill its vacancies. A new competition to recruit additional permanent PTO planners will be launched shortly. As an interim measure the Agency has appointed casual PTOs to fill vacancies temporarily. It is also continuing with a series of internal staff promotions to ensure knowledge and experience at all levels.

AQW 6089/08 specifically referred to sick absence levels in the Downpatrick Divisional Planning Office. I am pleased to advise that those vacancies have now largely been filled.

Planning Applications

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications that have been with her Department’s road section at Rathkelter House, Downpatrick, for up to (i) 6 months; (ii) 12

months; (iii) 18 months; and (iv) 24 months.

(AQW 6722/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret accurate figures for this sort of information are not kept in the Planning Service’s current electronic data recovery and storage system – 20/20. The figures could only be determined by a manual exercise in the Divisional Planning Office and this could not be done in the time available and would incur disproportionate costs.

Landfill Sites

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the actions that her Department will take to protect the human rights of communities who have had multiple applications for land fill sites in their areas. (AQW 6773/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My officials in Planning Service are required to determine planning applications on their individual planning merits. They have regard to all material planning considerations in the process of arriving at a decision. The rights of communities could be considered to be a material consideration.

The Department’s decisions on planning applications are taken with regard to the relevant development plan and published planning policies, both of which are assessed for human rights compliance.

The protection of human rights is therefore embodied in the decision making process for planning applications. This applies in all circumstances.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in her Department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6822/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department’s Human Resource Management System (HRMS) is unable to supply the level of detail requested. The following is the number of staff absent due to stress in each of the last 5 years irrespective of the number of days absent or their grade.

Period	No of staff
22 May 2003 - 21 May 2004	111
22 May 2004 - 21 May 2005	71
22 May 2005 - 21 May 2006	69

Period	No of staff
22 May 2006 - 21 May 2007	93
22 May 2007 - 21 May 2008	84

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the websites that come under the Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6442/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of DFP. The table includes the number of visitors since devolution as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visits to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement. It is not possible to provide a figure on the cost of maintaining each site as a figure for site maintenance is not held centrally and would attract a disproportionate cost to obtain.

Websites that come under DFP's responsibility:

Website	Visitors	Page views
www.dfpni.gov.uk	187,642	1,022,156
www.workplace2010ni.org	2,514	8,182
www.cpdni.gov.uk	61,331	359,436
www.interchange.org.uk	15,858	7,439
www.civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk	162,289	459,040
www.lpsni.gov.uk	210,353	1,035,889
www.lrni.gov.uk	96,262	12,002,873***
www.nisra.gov.uk	195,863	836,219
www.equality.nisra.gov.uk *	192,206	36,609
www.csu.nisra.gov.uk **	6,524	13,942
www.ninis.gov.uk *	77,413	886,478
www.nicensus2001.gov.uk *	16,872	20,450

Website	Visitors	Page views
www.nica.nisra.gov.uk *	6,268	31,331
www.groni.gov.uk *	317,300*	1,197,996
www.ratingreviewni.gov.uk	10,181	74,958
www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk	321,945	1,284,224
www.pay.nics.gov.uk	4,236	18,350
www.aasdni.gov.uk	23,936	80,484
www.onlineni.net	134,950	903,630
Handbook.nics.gov.uk	507	847
Spring.dfpni.gov.uk	3,223	4,796
www.dfpni.gov.uk/europeanfunding	8,396	34,432

* These figures relate to the period 8 May 2007 to end of 2 February 2008. Since this date these websites have been undergoing redevelopment.

** These figures relate to the period 3 February 2008 to 2 May 2008. Web Hosting, Delivery and Innovation Division, has advised that statistics are not available for this site prior to 3 February this year.

*** This figure is for hits only, as web hosting for www.lrni.gov.uk is provided by BT and is calculated differently.

Civil Service Commuter Statistics

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants who commute (i) on a daily basis; and (ii) at least once a week, from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast. (AQW 6521/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is not available.

Staff Absence

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the average number of days sick leave that were taken by staff in each Department. (AQW 6602/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The details requested are set out in the attached table.

These details are published annually and are available on website <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/pub-res-sick-absence>. Copies are also placed in the Library.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS SICK ABSENCE IN LAST 5 YEARS

	DSD	DEL	DFP	DE	DOE	DHSSPS	DARD	OFMDFM	DCAL	DETI	DRD	Overall
2002/2003	19.1	18.7	13.6	12.5	14.5	13.2	13.4	12.2	13.8	12.7	10.7	15.4
2003/2004	19.7	17.7	14.3	11.7	13.4	12.3	12.4	12.6	15.1	11.8	12.0	15.5
2004/2005	19.4	14.7	13.7	12.8	12.0	9.5	11.5	8.6	11.0	9.9	10.2	14.2
2005/2006	18.3	14.0	13.0	12.9	11.1	10.7	11.1	8.6	10.3	10.7	8.2	13.4
2006/2007	18.7	14.5	12.4	12.2	11.5	11.4	11.1	10.7	10.5	10.0	9.2	13.7

Peace III Programme

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what plans it has to address the issues raised in the Border Protestant Community and the EU Peace Programmes Report, published by the Special European Union Programmes Body, which has indicated residual discrimination and sectarianism against protestants in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 6611/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Special EU Programmes Body, in its role as Managing Authority for the PEACE III Programme, has made the Report available to all six local authorities of the Border Region of the Republic. Each local authority is currently developing a peace and reconciliation action plan under Theme 1.1 of PEACE III, Building Positive Relations at the Local Level. SEUPB's expectation is that these plans will address issues raised in the Report. The Report's recommendations will also be addressed through the PEACE III theme Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past and through general Programme implementation.

The Report recommended that provision be made in PEACE III for single identity funding. PEACE III will fund single identity activities where these can build community capacity for cross community engagement.

SEUPB will continue its work to ensure a fair allocation of programme funds. As before, SEUPB will promote the Programme throughout the eligible area and will encourage applications from all communities in all areas. EU PEACE funding will continue to be allocated objectively on the basis of the quality of the applications received. Applications will be assessed openly and transparently using the agreed selection criteria which reflect the programme's distinctive aims.

Equal Pay

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans his Department has to address equal pay issues in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(AQW 6907/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Equal Pay issues are not new to the public sector. I am aware that the devolved administration has inherited a number of potentially significant and serious issues that need to be resolved. This may involve a considerable number of civil servants. While there may be serious financial implications for the Executive I am not prepared to follow the trend of those who have preceded me and leave the equal pay issue unresolved. This is a test of the extent the Executive stands over its Programme for Government and its commitment to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The Executive are agreed that this issue must be tackled. I have instructed my officials to address this issue as a matter of urgency. The first step is to establish the size and scope of potential equal pay issues and what options might exist for resolving them. In parallel, I have asked officials to commence discussions with Trade Union Side on this matter.

Renewable Energy

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of public buildings with alternative energy supplies.

(AQO 3400/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Within the DFP managed office estate, two buildings are currently equipped with alternative energy supplies. Solar panels, ground water cooling and photo-voltaic panels are installed at Clare House and a combined heat and power (CHP) plant is in operation in Stormont House.

In addition 22% of the energy consumed in the estate was purchased from renewable sources (green electricity) during the 2005/06 financial year.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY**Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the

Health Service for treating sexually transmitted diseases. (AQW 6407/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): During 2007/08 the specialty of Genito-Urinary medicine incurred direct costs of approximately £3.661m. In addition to the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases this service also provides related services such as precautionary testing and family planning. Minor sexually transmitted diseases will also have been treated by GP's.

Family Planning Clinics

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if there are family planning clinics in all hospitals. (AQW 6414/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health Service family planning clinics are provided in the following hospitals:

- Craigavon Area Hospital
- Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry
- Erne Hospital, Enniskillen
- Ulster Hospital Dundonald
- Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast
- Belfast City Hospital
- Royal Maternity Hospital Belfast
- Bangor Community Hospital
- Newtownards Community Hospital
- IUD clinic at Braid Valley Hospital, Ballymena

Family planning clinics are also provided through a number of health and social care centres across the Province. In addition to these clinics, family planning advice is available through other hospital specialties and through GP services.

Belfast Health Action Zone

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funds secured by the Health Action Zone for each Local Implementation Action Group since their inception. (AQW 6438/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Health Action Zone (HAZ) is a strategic partnership of public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations working together to tackle inequalities in health and broader social exclusion. Developing integrated services for children and young people has been a key workstream of the Health Action Zone since its inception in 1999.

In 2004 Belfast Education and Library Board, on behalf of the HAZ, submitted to the Integrated Development Fund a funding application for a total of £5m to be spent over 3 years. In 2006 the decision with regard to the funding application to IDF was still outstanding. Nevertheless in the absence of a funding decision the Integrated Services for Children and Young People Project Board decided to proceed with the establishment of Local Implementation Action Groups (LIAGs) to cover the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Partnership Board areas.

In April 2007 IDF funding of £5m was released to BELB which is acting as the accountable HAZ partner for IDF funds.

LIAGs in Greater Shankill and West Belfast have prepared draft proposals for the use of IDF funding which have been submitted to the ISCYP Project Board for negotiation and approval. Indicative budgets of £2m have been set for each LIAG with £1m retained for common programmes and core costs. It is expected that implementation will commence at locality level towards the end of June 2008.

Stoma and Incontinence Appliances

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement on the arrangements for the dispensing of incontinence products in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 6445/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Stoma and incontinence appliances can be dispensed by pharmacy contractors, dispensing doctors and dispensing appliance contractors throughout Northern Ireland. These arrangements have been in place in Northern Ireland for a number of years.

Inpatients in hospital are supplied with any such products they may require during their stay; however, on discharge they are generally given a maximum of 3 days supply. This is to cover their needs until they have been in contact with their GP or district nurse to obtain a prescription.

After-School Groups

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give an assurance that full day care will be provided at Carryduff and Lisbane Playboard centres during the summer months. (AQW 6450/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Policy responsibility for Childcare transferred from my Department to the Department of Education in November 2006. Since November 2006,

DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young Peoples Package monies has been solely to act as a funding mechanism for centrally earmarked resources. Even though this funding arrangement and DHSSPS remit ended on 31 March 2008, I have extended funding to afterschool groups until 30 June 2008, using my own resources, to enable them to continue until the end of the school year.

From 30 June 2008 onwards, when these monies come to an end, it will be for each Department to decide what happens to schemes whose activities fall within their policy remits

Physiotherapists Employed In Health And Social Care

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of physiotherapists employed by the Health Service. (AQW 6451/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As at 31st March 2008, there were 974 (814.9 whole-time equivalent) physiotherapists employed in Health & Social Care.

Source: Human Resource Management System.

South Eastern Trust Plans

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has recommended the closure of the Ards Minor Injuries Unit. (AQW 6452/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have yet to consider SE Trust Plans in detail.

Operation Cancellations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 4 years, the number of operations that have been cancelled. (AQW 6453/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of operations that have been cancelled is not collected centrally.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting

time for women to receive results of smear tests. (AQW 6454/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 is outlined in the table below.

Hospital Laboratory	Average waiting time ¹ in days
Altnagelvin	10
Antrim	10
Belfast Link	24
Craigavon Area	21

Source: Cervical Screening Programme

1 Waiting time, as given above, is measured, in calendar days, from the date on which the hospital laboratory receives the smear test and the date on which the report leaves the laboratory.

Cervical Cancer Figures

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer. (AQW 6455/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of new cases of cervical cancer each year is held by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry. The most recent information available relates to 2005. The table below details the number of new cases of cervical cancer (ICD-10 C53) for 2001-2005.

Table: Incidence of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland 2001-2005

Year of diagnosis	No of new cases
2001	71
2002	82
2003	76
2004	73
2005	87

This information has been provided by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry and is the most up to date currently available.

Northern Ireland Fire And Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps he has taken to ensure that the money spent by the Fire

and Rescue Service to refurbish its headquarters (i) represents good value for money, and (ii) is durable.
(AQW 6464/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The day to day operational activity of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS), including capital and revenue expenditure, is a matter for the Chief Fire Officer and the NIFRS Board. However, NIFRS and its Board are constrained by a range of procedures set out in accountability guidelines covering the control of public sector finance.

These controls include:

- The preparation of an Economic Appraisal above a prescribed limit (currently exceeding £5,000) for proposed expenditure, in accordance with delegated limits.
- A requirement to have NIFRS Board / DHSSPS / DFP approval as appropriate, depending on the amount to be spent.
- European Union thresholds applicable at time of Tendering.
- Tenders invited by Public Advertisement.

Refurbishment at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters included refurbishment of Breathing Apparatus workshops (including the removal of asbestos); upgrading of power supply on NIE advice; replacement flooring; enhanced external security; relocation of an office and associated redecoration work. These works were carried out in accordance with the controls described.

Hospitals: Capital Expenditure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the level of capital investment in each hospital.
(AQW 6465/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The attached table details capital expenditure in each hospital for specific capital investment projects and the total amount of capital allocated in health and social services in each of the 3 years.

General Capital allocations to all Trust are also shown on the table. This is allocated to Trusts to enable them to address urgent minor works, repairs and replacement of equipment in both hospitals and primary and community based services, but cannot be disaggregated. While a detailed breakdown of General Capital figures is not available it is understood that a substantial percentage of General Capital is used for hospitals.

Hospital	2005/06 (£000's)	2006/07 (£000's)	2007/08 (£000's)
Altnagelvin	5,784	29,007	20,338
Antrim	2,104	1,221	3,224
Belfast City	9,888	9,603	2,868
Craigavon Area	4,059	2,860	9,529
Causeway	534	1,091	0
Daisy Hill	179	37	500
Downshire/Downe	2,000	9,063	22,886
Erne	0	550	1,151
Holywell	25	0	0
Lagan Valley	841	200	274
Mater	1,657	987	980
Mid-Ulster	0	150	406
Musgrave Park	4,658	1,029	62
New Enhanced Local Hospital Complex, Omagh	300	15,330	1,497
Royal Victoria	24,081	20,923	16,199
New Acute SW Hospital at Enniskillen	1,785	13,786	7,695
Tyrone & Fermanagh	0	0	721
Tyrone County	429	500	561
Ulster	13,972	21,146	21,320
Whiteabbey	0	150	0
Total capital spend in hospitals	72,296	127,633	110,211
General Capital	28,506	34,402	28,366
Total capital budget allocations	157,204	216,299	186,606

Mental-Health and Learning-Disability Funding for Children

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how much of the funding, allocated to implement the Bamford Review in the final budget for 2008-11, will be ring-fenced for children and young people with a learning disability or mental health difficulty.
(AQW 6490/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A proportion of the £44m additional funding secured for mental health and learning disability services over the next three years will benefit children, but no specific amount has been

earmarked for that purpose. Boards will make their decisions on funding on the basis of need in their areas.

Internet Content

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the necessity of stricter regulation of the internet to prevent access to sites promoting suicide and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. (AQW 6493/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have previously highlighted my concerns in relation to the dangers of harmful internet content to vulnerable people, particularly in relation to suicide and self harm. I have raised this issue with my Ministerial colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales, and I have insured that this matter has been tabled at North/South Ministerial Council and British/Irish Council meetings.

The recent Byron Report into harmful material on the internet and in video games has provided a further opportunity to consider this issue at UK-wide level. The Government has accepted Dr Byron's recommendations, and my Department will work with Whitehall and the devolved administrations to ensure her recommendations are implemented. This includes consideration of where the law around harmful material could usefully be clarified and appropriate enforcement responses put in place.

This is a very challenging area for which there is no quick fix. However, I remain convinced that a robust framework, including better regulation, is necessary to tackle the dangers harmful internet content, and I intend to continue to keep a major focus on this issue.

Forster Green Development

Ms Ni Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide (i) an update on plans to provide residential care for children and young people in hospital; and (ii) a timescale within which he will open these beds. (AQW 6496/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to use hospital for residential care. Hospital beds are provided to deliver acute care. Where a child or young person requires residential care, this will be provided in an appropriate setting within the community.

In relation to the proposed development at Forster Green, the Belfast Trust hopes to appoint a contractor for the building of a new young people's in-patient facility and a replacement child in-patient facility on the Forster Green site in May 2008. Work will commence on

site in early summer 2008, providing full planning permission is received. The building will be developed in two phases with the young people's unit being built in the 1st phase and the children's unit in the 2nd phase. The estimated date of opening will be December 2009 for Phase 1 and early 2010 for Phase 2.

Attempted Suicide Aftercare

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by parliamentary constituency, the assistance available for suicide related problems. (AQW 6504/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to answer your Ordinary Written AQ 6504/08 by 14 May 2008. I will answer as soon as possible.

Attempted Suicide Hospital Admissions

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail to number of attempted suicides in 2005, 2006 and 2007, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6506/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of attempted suicide in 2005, 2006 and 2007:

Parliamentary Constituency	2005	2006	2007
N/A	43	47	90
Belfast East	307	252	257
Belfast North	321	326	541
Belfast South	337	287	305
Belfast West	388	434	460
East Antrim	145	143	166
East Londonderry	138	123	114
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	217	230	120
Foyle	403	297	334
Lagan Valley	112	123	143
Mid Ulster	196	188	140
Newry And Armagh	261	210	174
North Antrim	218	175	177
North Down	254	129	163
South Antrim	219	193	237
South Down	259	223	257

Parliamentary Constituency	2005	2006	2007
Strangford	252	158	177
Upper Bann	381	318	138
West Tyrone	184	228	203
Total	4635	4084	4196

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Deaths and discharges are used as an approximation of admissions. These figures should not be used to denote individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than once in a year or across a number of years.

Mental-Health Patient Complaints

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5187/08, to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of complaints, in relation to the treatment of mental-health patients, against each Health and Social Care Trust that have not progressed to consideration by the relevant Health and Social Services Board or the Commissioner for Complaints. (AQW 6519/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information in the form requested is not available.

ANNEX

CHILDREN'S FUND PROJECTS

Mental-Health Patient Complaints

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of mental-health patients that have been assigned a new consultant psychiatrist after making a complaint against another. (AQW 6520/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Children's Fund Projects

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4275/08, to detail the projects that were previously supported by the children's fund which have now been granted funding for a further year, including details of the services for which the funding has been provided. (AQW 6523/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All Children's Fund projects that wished a further year's funding until March 2009 have been offered it. A full list of the projects, providing the detail that you require, is contained in the attached Annex.

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
Adoption U.K	Adoptive Parents Support Modules	Aims to develop and enhance the parenting skills of adoptive and foster parents of "hurt" children.	£40,061
Armagh Travellers Support Group	Children & Families Project	Provides facilities and access to family support services for traveller children & their parents.	£38,674
Barnardo's	Family Group Conference Scheme	Protects children and young people at risk by harnessing the strengths within the extended family/community to support, care for and protect the child	£261,709
Barnardo's	Parents and Children Together (PACT)	Supports young mothers recently out of care and their children, and young mothers whose children have been taken into care.	£68,973
Barnardo's	Young Parents Advice Information Bureau	Information and advice service for young parents and those who have a role in supporting them.	£35,983
Barnardo's	Carrick Child & Parent Project	Supports families through specialist parenting education programmes and structured childcare.	£57,635

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
Barnardo's	Parent Support Project	Assists parents/carers to cope effectively with children who are displaying behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.	£48,608
Craigavon Travellers Support Committee	Early Years Initiative	Promotes and encourages play as a developmental process for traveller children in the Craigavon area.	£79,995
Gasyard Development Trust	Gasyard Family Centre	A community-led initiative which supports a range of parenting and child health activity.	£58,412
Home-Start, Ards Peninsula & Comber	Supporting Young Families	Family support through home visiting.	£43,805
Home-Start, Armagh & Dungannon	Home-Start Outreach	Family support through home visiting.	£22,589
Home-Start, Down District	Home-Start Down Project	Family support through home visiting.	£85,159
Home-Start, Newry & Mourne	Kilkeel Scheme	Family support through home visiting.	£36,080
Larne Community Care Centre	Childcare Development Worker	Provides respite care for 4-12 year olds and supports young people aged 8-15 years experiencing difficulties.	£34,232
Lenadoon Community Forum	Fresh Start	Works with vulnerable children and young people 'at risk', and supports families in need.	£83,220
Mid-Ulster Child Contact Centre	Child Contact Centre	Provides child contact services.	£20,973
NI Cancer Fund for Children	Family Dynamics Project	Provides practical assistance and support to all children and young people in NI living with cancer and related illnesses, and to their families.	£44,550
NSPCC	Chance for Change	Provides a 12 week group work programme to parents, teachers and primary school children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.	£136,657
North West Community Support Partnership	Waterside Family Resource Centre	Provides a range of family support services for children aged 0-12 years and their parents who live in the most deprived areas of the Waterside.	£332,621
Parent's Advice Centre	Positive Parenting in Area of Social Need	Supports children and young people in need by working with parents in communities identified as needing intensive parenting support.	£58,733
Springwell Centre	Family Support	Support for vulnerable, troubled young people aged 11-18 years and their parents.	£17,731
Westville Family Resource Centre	Lifestart, Enniskillen	Provides a home-based child development programme for families with children from birth to age 5 years.	£20,473

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
YMCA, Lisburn	Small Talk single parent programme	Provides a structured training and education package for vulnerable parents of 'at risk' young people.	£14,633
YMCA, North Down - Bangor	Parents and Kids Together (PAKT)	A family based project that encourages parents to spend quality time with their children, promotes the family unit & improves community relations.	£38,029
ACET - Agencies in Consortium for Education & Training	ACET - Transitions	Transitional planning arrangements for young people with learning disabilities and physical disabilities.	£35,496
Artability	After Schools Project for Children with Disabilities	Addresses the needs of young people who have a learning or physical disability.	£61,359
Arthritis Care Northern Ireland	Positive Futures for Children & Young People with Arthritis	A structured support programme of participatory workshops and events to provide support to young people with arthritis.	£28,968
Barnardo's	Home from Home Project	Provides practical support to families of children with a disability aged 0-18 years through development of outreach services tailored to individual need.	£169,880
Barnardo's	Young Carers Scheme	A support service to children and young people who undertake the role of carers to parents and/or siblings with disabilities or long-term illness.	£121,812
Camowen Partnership Ltd.	Smart Kids After School Project	Provides after schools provision to accommodate moderate to profoundly disabled children.	£71,347
Stars	Early Years Initiative	Provides a structured learning environment, through play, for children aged 2-4 years who may have autistic spectrum disorders or development delays.	£61,098
PAPA	Support for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Support for children with autistic Spectrum Disorder	£69,050
Upper Springfield Development Trust	Action on Disability Project	The project supports children with disabilities and special needs, including children from the traveller community and other ethnic backgrounds.	£61,549
Contact a Family	Information Officer	Provides information about a range of organisations and services to parents and families of children with disabilities.	£41,793
NI Deaf Youth Association	Mentor Service	Provides a mentoring programme for deaf children and young people.	£47,792
NI Music Therapy Trust	ARIOSO	Provides a music therapy service Severe Learning Disability Schools.	£147,867

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
Aware Defeat Depression	Mood Matters	Promotes knowledge and understanding of the significance of mental health and depression in young people.	£23,908
Barnardo's	Pyramid Plus (Northern Area)	Works in partnership with children, parents, school and statutory and voluntary agencies, to raise self esteem and resilience of primary school children with emotional and social needs.	£121,433
Contact Youth Counselling Services	Youth Counselling Service in the Northern Board Area	Counselling service for young people who suffer mild mental health problems or who experience stress or difficulty.	£59,397
Mencap	Shout Out	A forum for young people with learning disabilities to discuss important issues relating to them, and to help them overcome barriers which prevent their integration into their communities.	£43,072
Nexus Institute	Outreach Trauma Counsellor	Provides therapeutic interventions for victims of sexual abuse.	£70,453
Nexus Institute	Personal & Social Education Programme	Provides education and information on sexual health issues to young people, and raises awareness of sexual abuse.	£31,405
Threshold	Applied Psychotherapy for Children & Young People	Provides psychotherapy to psychologically and emotionally distressed children and young people.	£47,952
VOYPIC	Shaping the Changes	This project surveys the views of young people who have been in care, enables them to come together and share their experiences of the care system and have their views heard on improvements to the system.	£61,784
Wave Trauma	Wave Youth	Provides a range of support and personal development programmes to children, young people and adults who have been directly bereaved or traumatised as a result of the Troubles.	£134,613
Ballymena Women's Aid	Domestic Violence Interagency & Community Development Worker	Provides temporary refuge to women and children suffering emotional, physical or sexual abuse within the home.	£37,671
Barnardo's	Domestic Violence Outreach Scheme	Provides a range of safety orientated individual and groupwork services to woman, children and young people who experience/have experienced domestic violence.	£38,505
Coleraine (Causeway) Women's Aid	Domestic Violence & Children - A Prevention and Intervention Project	Provides temporary refuge for women and their children who have suffered mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.	£71,087

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid	Children's Project	Supports children and young people suffering from physical and emotional abuse in the home.	£42,688
North Down & Ards Women's Centre	Children & Domestic Violence	Provides childcare services.	£12,810
Fermanagh Women's Aid	Refuge and community based aftercare children's services	Community-based preventative programme.	£50,500
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	Yahoo Project	Provides young people with information about healthy living and sexual well-being.	£44,969
Belfast Door/Challenge for Youth	Talk of the Town	Targets young people present on the streets of Belfast city centre. It targets those abusing drugs, alcohol and solvents as well as those with sexual exploitative behaviours.	£91,752
Brook Belfast	Clinic Service Provision	Provides clinical sessions which enhance young peoples self awareness and self esteem to ensure they develop confidence to make informed decisions about their sexual lives.	£31,094
Family Planning Association	Sexual Health Programme for Young Homeless	Partnership project with the Simon Community implementing a personal development programme and sexual health programme for homeless young people.	£31,042
Include Youth	Building For The Future (New Leaf)	Support to young people with a history of sexually inappropriate behaviour.	£53,186
Barnardo's	Newry Adolescent Partnership	Strengthens links with the community and promotes the interests of excluded young people.	£41,394
Corrymeela Community	Children & Youth in Need	Provides respite residential care for disadvantaged children aged 0-16 years.	£42,498
Extern West	Sperrin Janus Project	Supports young people who live at home or in residential care, and who are assessed by social services as being at high risk of being admitted into care or custody.	£141,703
Harmony Community Trust	Glebe House Respite Project	Therapeutic interventions for young people.	£71,765
NIACRO	Child Diversion Project	Support services to children identified through education, police, child care and community systems as being at risk of school exclusion, offending or removal to care.	£252,469
NIACRO	Mentoring Scheme	Works with young offenders and is designed to lower the risk of them re-offending.	£149,939

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
NIACRO	Preventing risk of developing an offending career	Support services to children of prisoners and offending parents, so as to reduce the risk of the children becoming involved in the criminal system.	£102,220
Ocean Youth Trust Northern Ireland	Development Through Sail Training	Provides a developmental programme through sail training for young people who have problems associated with drugs, alcohol and anti-social behaviour.	£36,719
Ulster Quaker Service Committee	Quaker Cottage Teen Programme.	Targets 13-15 year olds exhibiting a variety of anti social behaviours and who have been referred by social workers and primary care workers.	£45,657
Arts Providers Partnership	Teen Age	Provides artistic services to young people in residential care through a mixture of projects including arts, music and information technology.	£28,290
Belfast Travellers Support Group (An Munia Tober)	Gayla Expression	Works with traveller children to develop their creative and artistic talents.	£44,358
Down Community Arts	Art For All	Art programme aimed at improving the quality of life of vulnerable children and young people by encouraging their confidence and self esteem.	£109,560
An Tearmann	Project Co-Ordinator	Provides early years services, parenting courses and adult education to members of the Traveller community.	£41,262
Artillery Steering Group	New Lodge Area Project	Provides support for the social and educational needs of young adults.	£54,517
Belfast Community Circus School	Circus in the City	Works with young people excluded from mainstream schools.	£31,086
Bridge Community Association	Woodstock Area Project	Alternative education project for young people, and provision of youth facilities.	£48,347
Council for Homeless NI	The Whole Shebang NI Homelessness Project	Provides training and development classes for young homeless people.	£38,322
Derry Travellers Support Group	Traveller Childcare Project	Provides a family-centred programme of activities.	£18,679
Derry Women's Centre	Moving Up Mothers (MUM)	Supports young mothers, through access to additional education and integration opportunities and on-site childcare facilities.	£48,590
Drumgor Detached Youth	Tackling real issues & assessing learning	Provides support to young people at risk with a focus on future goals and ambitions.	£35,627
Falls Women's Centre	Special Needs Children's Project	Provides care for children with special needs in a day care setting.	£35,844

Organisation	Project Title	Service Type	2008-9 Allocation
Link Family and Community Centre, The	Link Youth Project	Programme to enhance life skills, relationship building, training for employment, reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect for others.	£22,046
Marrowbone Community Association	Marrowbone Youth Club	Aims to increase the capacity of young people to make choices and change their lives in a positive manner through awareness programmes, leadership roles, and becoming mentors to other children.	£35,164
Newry & Mourne Travellers Partnership	Travellers Partnership	Summer scheme for traveller children aged 4 to 16 years old, with young travellers being trained and participating as volunteers.	£23,283
NIPPA	Toybox	Supports early years development and educational opportunities for Traveller children.	£197,955
Old Warren Community Association	Putting the Children First	Supports the educational development of children, including child safety and child protection issues.	£34,836
Taughmonagh Community Forum	Vision Five	Supports children and young people to attain educationally.	£38,311
Tiny Tots	Pre-school Playgroup	Pre-school playgroup services.	£15,372
Triangle Housing Association	Triangle Supported Employment Service	Provides support to young people within mainstream education who have special education needs.	£69,163
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Tullymore Children & Young Peoples Project	Provides an expansion of day care services for children so that parents can attend training courses.	£61,682
Vine Centre	Vine Family Playgroup	Provides after-schools services.	£19,410
Youth Action Northern Ireland	Moving on - an opportunity for young mothers	Support to teenage mothers with low academic qualifications and limited experience of the work place to gain training, qualifications and employment.	£84,912

Flattened Head Syndrome

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost incurred by his department to send children with flattened head syndrome for treatment in England.
(AQW 6527/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Records show that in the last five years, no child has been sent to England, or elsewhere outside Northern Ireland, for treatment for this condition.

Flattened Head Syndrome

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if children with flattened head syndrome have to travel to England for treatment.
(AQW 6528/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Records show that in the last five years, no child has been sent to England, or elsewhere outside Northern Ireland, for treatment for this condition.

Local Commissioning Groups

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to the inclusion of dentists on Local Commissioning groups within the Health and Social Care Reform. (AQW 6542/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The inclusion of dentists in the composition of local commissioning groups will be considered as part of the response to the public consultation which closes on 12 May 2008.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the websites that come under his Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6547/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has responsibility for a number of websites which are maintained by Departmental staff who also undertake a range of other work. It is not possible to identify the specific costs related to website maintenance. A list of these websites and the numbers of visitors to each of these sites is set out in the table.

DHSSPS WEBSITES AND VISITORS

Website	No. of Visitors
DHSSPS Internet	1/5/07 - 1/5/08 - 499,849
Clinical Resources and Efficiency Support Team	1/11/07 - 1/5/08 - 34,648
Bamford Review	1/11/07 - 1/5/08 - 8,425
Care Tribunal	1/11/07 - 1/5/08 - 117
Occupational Health Service	1/11/07 - 1/5/08 - 1,549
European Centre for Connected Health (Site live from 21/2/08)	21/2/08 - 1/5/08 - 759
Board for Mental Health and Learning Disability (NI) (Site live from 4/2/08)	4/2/08 - 1/5/08 - 30
Inquiry into Hyponatraemia Related Deaths in NI	1/8/07 - 1/5/08 - 1,657
Investing for Health (currently offline)	No statistics available
Regional Multiprofessional Audit Group (currently offline)	No statistics available
NI Civil Service Sports Association	1/5/07 - 1/5/08 - 13,304

Work from Home

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff in his Department, since devolution, who have been able to work from home. (AQW 6549/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since devolution 170 members of staff have carried out some of their duties from home for a period agreed by their line management. Homeworking arrangements may be full days or part days.

Discretionary Student Incentive Scheme

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of students from Northern Ireland who are studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and also currently receiving the discretionary student incentive scheme in (a) England; (b) Scotland; (c) Wales; and (d) the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) the qualification criteria for this discretionary student incentive scheme. (AQW 6557/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No students from Northern Ireland studying for a Degree in Social Work in England, Scotland, Wales and Republic of Ireland are currently receiving the discretionary student incentive scheme.

The criteria for eligibility for the Discretionary Student Incentive scheme is as follows, the applicant must be:

- domiciled in Northern Ireland;
- undertaking a NISCC approved programme of study in Northern Ireland leading to the Degree in Social work;
- currently registered with NISCC on the relevant part of the Register; and
- who are not employed as Regional Social Work Degree Trainees.

Fraud

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to uncover the extent of the frauds affecting (i) Health Boards and (ii) Health and Social Care Trusts, represented by Brangham, Bagnall and Bagnall in compensation claims. (AQW 6558/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A forensic investigation commissioned by the Department determined the quantum of loss as

£278k and as a result of civil proceedings this amount has been agreed to be recovered in full.

Public Procurement Procedures

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to review the public procurement procedures to be used when engaging legal services to act on behalf of (i) Health Boards; and (ii) Health and Social Care Trusts, being sued in compensation claims. (AQW 6559/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A process to establish new contract arrangements for the provision of legal services to Health Boards and Health and Social Care Trusts has been initiated by the HPSS through the Legal Services Forum, a group comprising of representatives from both Boards and Trusts, under the chairmanship of John Compton, Chief Executive, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

As part of this process, I shall ensure that robust public procurement procedures are followed.

Transfer of Legal Files

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the procedures that were followed by (i) Health Boards; and (ii) Health and Social Care Trusts, which allowed legal files relating to compensation claims to be transferred from the legal firm Brangham, Bagnall and Bagnall to the legal firm Brangham and Bagnall, without going out to tender. (AQW 6560/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were no legal files transferred from the legal firm Brangham, Bagnall and Bagnall to the legal firm Brangham and Bagnall.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3776/08, to detail his plans to fund the increased need in dementia services, in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. (AQW 6566/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, I negotiated an additional £1.85 million to fund dementia respite places and £2.5 million to be spent on Mental Health advocacy and support services, of which a proportion will be allocated for dementia sufferers and their carers over the next 3 years.

Visually Impaired

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the provisions in place in relation to the appointment procedures and making appointment cards legible for those with 'registered' visual impairment. (AQW 6568/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: If a patient is known to be visually impaired, staff across the five Health and Social Care Trusts will communicate with the patient in a way that best meets their individual needs or preferences. This can include a telephone call to the patient, making out appointment cards in large print and the provision of information in alternative formats.

Furthermore, as part of the new disability duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Trusts have developed Disability Action Plans. The implementation of these plans will include working with disabled people to continue to ensure effective communication.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how he intends to take forward the 'increased awareness training for GPs', in the area of pre-senile dementia (under 65 year-olds) in the current Health and Social Care Trust areas; and (ii) the provision he intends to make for this initiative in relation to funding. (AQW 6569/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is a need for increasing awareness of dementia, including early onset dementia, across all sectors of the health and social care system. Awareness training will be a key component of the strategy for improving dementia services which is currently being prepared by my Department.

This may involve integrating dementia awareness training into existing professional training programmes, or by targeting specific groups, such as GPs, with tailored one-off programmes. The costs of funding these initiatives will become clearer as the dementia services strategy is developed.

Dentist Records

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of practicing dentists within the Foyle parliamentary constituency, and to provide a breakdown of the

number of these dentists who accept Health Service patients and private treatments. (AQW 6570/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Central Services Agency holds a record of dentists who provide full or partial Health Service treatment to patients. Information on dentists exclusively providing private treatment is not available.

At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 43 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Foyle parliamentary constituency². No information is available in respect of how many of these are currently accepting new Health Service patients but 38 had new registrations recorded during the period between April 2007 and March 2008.

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. Statistics are at 1st May 2008 and are based on the location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Malnutrition Statistics

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) children; and (ii) adults, suffering from malnutrition in each of 2005, 2006 and 2007. (AQW 6576/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of children and adults suffering from malnutrition is not available.

Eating Disorder Assistance

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans for the development of an All-Ireland centre for children and adolescents who have eating disorders. (AQW 6584/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no current plans to develop an All-Ireland centre for the treatment of children and adolescents with eating disorders.

Departmental Legal Costs

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money his Department has spent on (i) legal costs due to challenges in court; and (ii) compensation settlements, since May 2007. (AQW 6585/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has spent:

- (i) £273,570 on legal costs due to challenges in court since May 2007, and
- (ii) £50,000 on compensation settlements since May 2007.

Service Framework Development

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the conditions he proposes should have new service frameworks established. (AQW 6589/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Boards and Trusts, working with local interest groups, submitted a list of regional priorities for future service framework development to my Department. Following evaluation of these proposals, I have agreed that work should commence on the development of a Service Framework for Children's Health and Wellbeing and a Service Framework for Older People's Health and Wellbeing.

It is anticipated that additional areas for service framework development will be taken forward from 2009/10. These will be drawn from the remaining priorities identified and evaluated by the Department. These include musculoskeletal conditions, physical disability and sensory impairment, sexual health and diabetes.

Service Framework Development

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the requirement for a service framework for diabetes. (AQW 6590/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed that work should commence on the development of a Service Framework for Children's Health and Wellbeing and a Service Framework for Older People's Health and Wellbeing.

It is anticipated that additional areas for service framework development will be taken forward from 2009/10. These will be drawn from the remaining priorities identified and evaluated by the Department. These include musculoskeletal conditions, physical disability and sensory impairment, sexual health and diabetes.

In drawing up these priorities I have taken into account that the cardiovascular framework addresses a wide range of the key elements of good diabetes care and the work currently underway to implement the CREST Taskforce Report.

Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients

Ms Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons why Rheumatoid Arthritis patients, who meet the criteria for treatment with biological drugs (Cytokine Inhibitors), face a 2 year delay before treatment starts. (AQW 6621/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Despite significant additional investment in biological drugs for severe inflammatory arthritis in recent years, there continue to be unacceptably lengthy waiting times to start treatment. Since these expensive specialist drugs were introduced a few years ago there has been a high growth in demand and many competing pressures for limited health service funding.

In the last two years, over 540 patients have been started on biologic therapy for the treatment of arthritic conditions.

I am fully committed to improving access to biologic drugs for severe arthritis. In the budget, I secured additional funding amounting to £39 million for specialist drugs and the infrastructure for their delivery. A significant part of that allocation will ensure that the waiting time for biological treatments for arthritis is reduced to 21 weeks by March 2011.

Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give his assessment of the reliability of the emergency ambulances presently operating in Dungannon in responding to all emergency situations. (AQW 6680/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has assured me that all of their fleet of emergency ambulances are regularly serviced, have a current MOT certificate where required by law and are roadworthy. This includes those ambulances based at Dungannon and any other ambulances that may respond to calls from the Dungannon area.

Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to replace emergency ambulances in Dungannon which are over seven years old, or have travelled in excess of 100,000 miles. (AQW 6681/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) is responsible for determining when

its A&E ambulances should be replaced. Some £14.5 million capital funding will be made available during the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period to 2011 to modernise NIAS's fleet, estate, equipment and IT infrastructure and NIAS has indicated that some £10.4m of this will be allocated to its fleet replacement programme.

Child Protection

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the agreement at a previous North-South Ministerial Council meeting that an all-Ireland approach to vetting and exchange of information would be headed up jointly by his Department and the Office of the Minister for Children, to provide a timescale within which this will take effect. (AQW 6687/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It has been agreed that the Chief Social Services Officer and the Director General in the Office of the Minister for Children will lead a cross border group of officials to take forward development of a work programme to deliver the child protection issues agreed at the North South Ministerial Council meeting on 7 February 2008.

Officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety met with colleagues from the Office of the Minister for Children on 17 April 2008 and agreed the infrastructure to progress work on cross border child protection issues. Work is underway to draft terms of reference to facilitate establishment of sub groups to progress the work.

An initial progress report will be provided to the next meeting of the North South Ministerial Council on 28 May 2008 with a more substantive progress report being provided for the North South Ministerial Council meeting in October 2008.

Healthcare in Prisons and Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the services his Department has been contracted to provide at (a) HM Prisons; and (b) the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism; (ii) to outline how much he has budgeted for each service; and (iii) to clarify the source of funding for these services. (AQW 6689/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i)(a) The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the provision of a range of

healthcare services at HMP Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre including;

- General practice sessions & on-call support;
- Nursing care for mental health and physical needs;
- Dentistry, optical treatment; and
- Psychiatry sessions.

In addition, secondary care specialists can provide consultations within prison healthcare units, or prisoners, with appropriate security measures, may also attend hospitals in the community for treatment.

(i)(b) None

(ii)(a) The budget for prison healthcare services in 2008/09 is £6,238,640.

(ii)(b) N/A

(iii)(a) The budget for prison healthcare services transferred permanently, into the DHSSPS baseline, from the NI Prison Service on 1 April 2008. DHSSPS have invested £225k in additional mental health services from funds ring fenced for prison healthcare in 2006/07. There has been no detrimental effect on existing health and social care services.

(iii)(b) N/A

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any contact he has had with the Minister for Education or his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the provision of emergency and consultant services at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism.

(AQW 6690/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have corresponded with the Minister for Education on general health issues relating to the Middletown Centre for Autism.

Free Personal Care

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the consideration he has given to excluding family homes from financial assessment for personal care costs. (AQW 6695/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I informed the house in May 2007 that I had commissioned a report on the cost of free personal care and a number of possible alternatives amendments to the current charging regime for residential and nursing home care. Among those alternative amendments was the exclusion of the

family home from the financial assessment. I am currently considering the findings of the report. Within the context of my Department's budget settlement, I am working hard to ensure the best possible deal for all the people of Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to provide greater clarification regarding these proposals over the coming weeks.

Free Personal Care

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the consideration he has given to (i) introducing a personal expenses allowance for people in receipt of personal care; and (ii) raising thresholds before requiring contributions to personal care costs. (AQW 6696/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Residents in care homes already benefit from a weekly personal expenses allowance. Where personal care is provided as part of a domiciliary care package in a person's own home, there is no charge. I therefore see no reason to introduce a personal expenses allowance for people in their own home when there is no drain on their resources as a result of charging.

In May 2007 I informed the Assembly I had commissioned a report on the cost of free personal care and a number of possible alternatives, including increasing thresholds before requiring contributions to personal care costs. I am currently considering that analysis. Within the context of my Department's budget settlement, I am working hard to ensure the best possible deal for all the people of Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to provide greater clarification regarding these proposals over the coming weeks.

At Home Nursing Care

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nursing care provision available to people in their own homes following discharge from hospital. (AQW 6697/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The provision of nursing care to people in their own homes following discharge from hospital is based on a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the individual, their family and carers. Assessment is carried out in partnership between relevant health and social care professionals within an integrated framework to secure the most appropriate response to individual needs.

Health and Social Care Trusts provide a range of nursing packages which range from routine visits by community nurses to intensive supervision packages

for people with highly complex needs. HSC Boards and Trusts may also work in partnership with voluntary sector organisations to secure the delivery of appropriate care provision.

Waterside Hospital

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans for future services at Waterside Hospital. (AQW 6698/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Waterside Hospital is a 95-bed facility providing continuing care, intermediate care, rehabilitation and in-patient mental health services for older people in the Londonderry, Strabane and Limavady areas.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust is committed to improving the quality of services to this group of patients and has now secured additional resources to provide an ortho-rehabilitation service. This will lead to a significant enhanced rehabilitation service for those individuals over age 65 following trauma or orthopaedic surgery.

Regulation of Pharmacies

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on proposals for the regulation of Pharmacy; and to detail any future plans he has in relation to the regulation of Pharmacy. (AQW 6699/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recently met representatives of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and am now in receipt of their proposals for the future regulation of pharmacy in Northern Ireland.

Having received an update on the formation of the proposed General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), from the Chairman of the Pharmacy Regulation and Leadership Oversight Group, I have decided it would be premature to make any decisions before the GPhC has been formed and has established its protocols to deal with devolved matters.

My department will continue to work with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and the other relevant bodies to ensure that patients and the public are fully protected at all times.

Health Service Dental Practices

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all dental practices in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Portadown,

that currently accept Health Service patients.

(AQW 6701/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No information is available in respect of which practices are currently accepting new Health Service patients. However, those that recorded new patients registered to a Health Service dentist within that practice, at any time during the period between April 2007 and March 2008, are shown in the tables below.

- i) Dental practices in Banbridge¹ that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
26-32 Rathfriland Street	Banbridge	Bt32 3la
4 Newry Road	Banbridge	Bt32 3hf
11a Church Street	Banbridge	Bt32 4aa
9a Church Street	Banbridge	Bt32 4as
3a Jingers Court	Banbridge	Bt32 3yj
16 Newry Rd	Banbridge	Bt32 3hn
35 Rathfriland Street	Banbridge	Bt32 3la

Source: Central Services Agency

- ii) Dental practices in Lurgan¹ that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
5 Robert Street	Lurgan	Bt66 8be
52 William Street	Lurgan	Bt66 6jb
21 Church Place	Lurgan	Bt66 6ey
20 Church Place	Lurgan	Bt66 6ey
42 North Street	Lurgan	Bt67 9ah
47 High Street	Lurgan	Bt66 8ah

Source: Central Services Agency

- iii) Dental practices in Portadown¹ that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
83a Bridge Street	Portadown	Bt63 5aa
47 Carleton Street	Portadown	Bt62 3ep
45 Thomas Street	Portadown	Bt62 3af
1 Connaught Park	Portadown	Bt62 3df
45 William Street	Portadown	Bt62 3nx
74 Gilford Rd	Portadown	Bt63 5eg

Source: Central Services Agency

Note:

- 1 The above dental practices have been selected based on the town name appearing in the practice addresses held on the CSA database.

Diabetes

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of whole time equivalent diabetes and endocrinology consultants in each of the Trust areas; and (ii) the ratio of diabetes and endocrinology consultants to the general population, broken down by Trust area.[R]

(AQW 6707/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is provided in the Tables below.

- (i) Consultants in diabetes and endocrinology (whole-time equivalent)

HSC Trust	Whole-time equivalent
Belfast	7.7
Northern	4.0
Southern	4.0
South Eastern	5.0
Western	1.9
All Trusts	22.6

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

- (ii) Ratio of consultants in diabetes and endocrinology (whole-time equivalent to the general population.

HSC Trust	Diabetes & Endocrinology consultants (WTE) per 100,000 population
Belfast	2.31
Northern	0.90
Southern	1.49
South Eastern	1.19
Western	1.02
All Trusts	1.38

Source: Mid-year estimate of population 2006, General Register Office

There are a high proportion of consultants within diabetes and endocrinology at the Belfast Trust due to the regional centre for this specialty being located at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Diabetes

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any plans to increase the number of health professionals allied to medicine working in Diabetes in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.[R]

(AQW 6708/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: The recruitment of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources.

However the Western Trust has a strategy to develop a Trust-wide service for Diabetes. There is a Diabetic Steering group and Allied Health Professionals are inputting into this overall strategy. As Reform and Modernisation continues with the whole of the HSC, any gaps in AHP input will be identified and additionality in AHP services will be sought.

Physiotherapy Services

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the action he has taken to provide sufficient physiotherapy services within the North West region, given the regional imbalances that exist within this sector.

(AQW 6712/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: To support service modernisation, Western Board have commissioned a range of physiotherapy services including, critical care, diabetes, inpatient paediatric, cancer, lymphodema, intermediate care, respiratory, conditions management and integrated clinical and treatment teams (ICATS)

Waiting times for all Physiotherapy services in Western Board have achieved the Departmental PFA 26 week target set for March 2008. They are currently engaged with other Boards and Trusts and the Department in a programme of work to bring about further reduction to 13 weeks by the end of March 2009.

This will include the development of regional access criteria, care pathways, discharge protocols and standardisation of information across Northern Ireland. The outcome of this work will help to inform service gaps, resource deficits and equity issues.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to identify who is accountable for implementation of (i) the no smoking policy; and (ii) enforcing the no smoking 'Red Zone', at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 6725/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Overall responsibility for implementing the policy on smoking at the Royal Victoria Hospital lies with the Chief Executive of Belfast Health & Social Care Trust supported by the Medical Director. Day-to-day support is provided by Executive and Non-Executive Directors, Senior Managers and Ward/

Departmental Managers. In addition, all staff have a responsibility to promote the policy.

The Trust's policy does not permit smoking at entrances/exits and "Red Zones" were introduced in order to guide the public as to where entrances begin and end. However, legislative controls on smoking as set out in the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and underpinning regulations, apply only to premises that are enclosed or substantially enclosed.

Regulation 2 of the Smoke-free (Premises, Vehicle Operators and Penalty Notices) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 defines "enclosed" and "substantially enclosed". A copy of the regulations was placed in the Assembly Library.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will undertake to commence a public inquiry into cleanliness levels at the Royal Victoria Hospital between general hygiene audits. (AQW 6728/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have no plans to commission a public inquiry into cleanliness levels at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Nursing/Residential Home Residents

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the procedures for Nursing/Residential Home residents to sell their home and assets to pay for them living there permanently. (AQW 6746/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC Trusts required by Articles 36 and 99 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to assess a person's ability to pay for their residential and nursing home care. The Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1993 set out how a financial assessment of capital and income should be carried out to determine how much a person can afford to pay towards the cost of that care.

Where a resident has more than £22,250 of capital, including in some cases the value of the resident's former home, they are liable for the full cost of their care. However, there is no requirement to sell the home should the resident choose to meet their assessed contribution from other means. Residents can retain up to £13,500 of capital before having to make a contribution to the cost of their care from capital. In those circumstances, however, residents are expected to contribute from their income.

Nursing/Residential Home Residents

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money a Nursing/Residential Home resident would be allowed to have in savings before having to pay to live there permanently. (AQW 6747/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC Trusts required by Articles 36 and 99 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to assess a person's ability to pay for their residential and nursing home care. The Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1993 set out how a financial assessment of capital and income should be carried out to determine how much a person can afford to pay towards the cost of that care.

Where a resident has more than £22,250 of capital, including in some cases the value of the resident's former home, they are liable for the full cost of their care. However, there is no requirement to sell the home should the resident choose to meet their assessed contribution from other means. Residents can retain up to £13,500 of capital before having to make a contribution to the cost of their care from capital. In those circumstances, however, residents are expected to contribute from their income.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many babies were born in ambulances travelling to maternity hospitals in each Health and Social Services Board area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6867/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service does not record information about births occurring in its vehicles on the way to hospital.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many babies were born in ambulances travelling to the Ulster Hospital from the Downpatrick area since 1999. (AQW 6868/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service does not record information about births occurring in its vehicles on the way to hospital.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints have been received over the last three months in relation to the level of cleanliness of the toilet area on floor one, and the restaurant area on floor two, of the Royal Victoria hospital.
(AQW 6914/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During the period January to March 2008 there was one formal written complaint regarding the level one toilet area and no formal written complaints regarding the restaurant on level two in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

During the month of April there was one formal written complaint with regard to the level one toilet area and no formal written complaints relating to the restaurant.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give reasons for the delay in an ambulance attending the emergency request to 77 Portaferry Road, Cloughy, on 24 December 2007.
(AQW 6964/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that an emergency call was received for this address at 23.36hrs on 25 December 2007. The nearest ambulance resource, at Newtownards Ambulance Station, was allocated the call at 23.37hrs and arrived on scene at 0007hrs on 26 December. {This response was outside the standard set for this type of emergency}

The response time for any emergency ambulance response is dependent on unexpected peaks in demand, the time of day as well as traffic and weather conditions. I sincerely apologise that despite recent substantial improvement in ambulance service performance the response on this occasion was less than we have come to expect of the service.

The ambulance service is in the midst of a programme of modernisation and reform which will see additional investment of some £23.5m over the next three years. This additional funding will enable NIAS to introduce a number of new ways of working and new technology which will secure the current progress in performance and I believe significant further improvement, including in the more rural areas such as the Ards Peninsula.

Review of Support Provision for Carers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the terms of reference he has agreed with the Minister of Social Development in relation to their joint review of carers provision.
(AQW 7006/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed in principle to a joint review of support provisions for carers with the Minister for Social Development. We are currently discussing terms of reference for the review and hope to agree these in the next few weeks.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foyle Connect Project

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the rationale behind his decision to withdraw funding from the Foyle Connect project.
(AQW 6202/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): The decision was taken in order to safeguard public funds. Audits had shown that Foyle Connect exercised inadequate or ineffective controls in relation to record keeping and financial management and had not taken steps to address these issues.

Rail Accidents

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will provide an assurance that all the recommendations contained in the Rail Accident Investigation Branch report in relation to the accident at crossing XL202 will be implemented.
(AQW 6415/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department, as the Safety Authority for railways, has received the Rail Accident Investigation Branch report into the accident at crossing XL202. I have asked officials to work closely with Northern Ireland Railways and the Rail Accident Investigation Branch to ensure that all recommendations included in the report are fully considered and implemented if appropriate. None of the recommendations relates to matters that were directly causal or contributory to the accident.

Departmental Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6432/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department does not have mechanisms in place to monitor the extent to which the Department's correspondence and distribution of publications is carried out electronically.

In line with NICS targets, my Department has moved from a position of using hard copy as standard to one whereby online publication is used whenever possible and practical. Doing so promotes savings in environmental and economic terms.

It is not practical to totally extinguish hard-copy publishing as not every intended recipient of the published information will have access to the necessary technology. My Department therefore, continues to offer the option of information in hard copy and other formats as required.

Airport Car Parking

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he has taken to ensure that car parking charges at (i) short stay; and (ii) long stay car parks, at (a) Belfast International Airport; (b) George Best Belfast City Airport; and (c) City of Derry/Londonderry Airport, are fair and reasonable, and do not constitute over-charging. (AQW 6498/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Weir, the Member for North Down on 19 January 2008.

Public Road Maintenance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the reasons for the delays to repairs to Francis Street, Newtownards, which were reported four months ago; and (ii) the timescale for the Department's Charter Response for such repairs. (AQW 6505/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I should explain that Roads Service's Maintenance Standards for the recording of defects comprise 3 main elements:

- **inspections:** public roads are inspected at set frequencies, which depend on the road environment and the volume of vehicle or pedestrian traffic on the road or footway;

- **defect classification:** each pothole or surface defect with an abrupt level difference greater than 20mm is classified into one of four defect categories C1 to C4
- **response times:** each defect has a target response time within which it should be repaired. The response time depends on the severity of the defect, the volume of traffic and road environment eg: Urban or Rural.

This approach satisfies my Department's obligation under Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, to maintain the public road network in reasonable condition, as well as recognising our finite resources.

In the case of Frances Street, Newtownards, Roads Service staff are aware of an area of a localised depression in the carriageway around a manhole cover. This is not, however, considered to be hazardous and in need of urgent repair.

Under the current Roads Service Maintenance Standards for Safety, the normal response to this type of defect is to repair it during the next available programme of works, although its condition will be reviewed at each new inspection. In this regard I am unable to give you a precise timescale for the repair at present.

Speed Limits

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the proven dangers of excessive speed, if he intends to reduce speed limits in housing estates and other built up areas to 20 mph. (AQW 6553/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: While my Department's Roads Service encourages and supports 20mph zones in situations where there is a risk to vulnerable road users, I have no plans to generally reduce speed limits in housing estates and other built up areas to 20 mph. However, a 20mph speed limit can be introduced in areas on a targeted basis.

The guidelines for the design of road layouts in residential developments are contained in 'Creating Places', a guide produced jointly by the Planning Service and Roads Service. Creating Places requires that traffic calming measures are designed into the layout of residential roads to reduce vehicle speeds. If a traffic-calming scheme is being implemented in a residential area, then where possible, it will be as a 20mph zone.

A review of my Department's Speed Management policy has been carried out by Roads Service, in conjunction with PSNI and the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Branch. The draft

outcome of the review is currently with the Regional Development Committee for scrutiny and their comments are expected shortly. The draft policy describes how speed limits are to be set on roads right across the North, including those in residential areas.

Traffic Flow

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the latest available average daily traffic flows in (i) High Street; (ii) Railway Street; (iii) Bridge Street; and (iv) Cherryvalley Line, Comber. (AQW 6595/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that some 270 traffic census sites are strategically located throughout the North, on both the major and minor road network. Traffic flows are monitored at each of these sites for at least one week in every quarter of the year and an annual average is then calculated. The information is then published in the Traffic and Travel Information Report.

Unfortunately there are no permanent traffic census sites on any of the routes listed above. Average daily traffic flows are not, therefore, available for these roads.

Roads Service did, however, carry out an assessment of traffic flows in Railway Street between 30 July and 5 August 2007 and in Cherryvalley Line between 27 August and 2 September 2007. The 5 day average flows during these periods were 4,300 and 9,200 vehicles, respectively. These assessments were carried out in response to requests received for traffic schemes at these locations.

Department Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the websites that come under his Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6606/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The table below details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of my Department. It includes the number of visitors since devolution as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visitors (or "hits") to sites are not an accurate form of measurement.

Comprehensive figures on the costs of maintaining each site are not available as the responsibility is a percentage of individual staff time with variations in grades and amount of time allocated to the role.

The cost for external hosting and associated technical support for the period was £20,831.

WEBSITES THAT COME UNDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DRD:

Website	Visitors	Page views
http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index.htm	111,087	23,512,914
http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/	149,942	799,461
http://www.trafficwatchni.com/	250,000*	700,000*
http://roadimprovements.roadsni.gov.uk	31,676	137,740
http://www.travelwiseni.co.uk	18,489	111,805
http://www.ni-transportguide.info	16,400	2,670,915
http://www.waterreformni.gov.uk	3,913**	13,572**
DRD Intranet site	1,241	135,176

* These figures cover the period August 2007 to May 2008

** These figures cover 08 May 2007 to 18 September 2007 (site moved to become part of DRD Internet – www.drdni.gov.uk on 18 September 2007)

Parking in Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans for resident parking permits in the Millisle area. (AQW 6613/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to residents parking permits in general, I recently launched the informal consultation process for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in five areas of inner Belfast. Until the outcome of this consultation and the resolution of problems associated with implementation and operation have been dealt with, it is considered unwise to introduce any further schemes

However, in relation to AQW 6615/08, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) sets out my Department's parking policy across the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the Plan period. For the North Down area, the Plan proposes that on-street parking controls are introduced in the urban centre of Bangor, along with more effective enforcement.

My Departments Roads Service has advised that it intends to commence initial parking surveys within residential areas in the centre of Bangor later this year. The areas surveyed will then be prioritised and considered, along with others, for possible inclusion in future residents' parking schemes.

It is not possible at this stage to identify how long it will be before scheme design will start in the North Down area.

In relation to AQW 6613/08, AQW6614/08 and AQW 6616/08, there are presently no plans to introduce residents' parking schemes in Millisle, Donaghadee and Holywood. However, if there is a specific area, at any of these locations, that you wish to be considered for a residents' parking scheme, officials from my Department's Roads Service would be happy to carry out preliminary surveys, to establish the need and priority of such a request.

Parking in Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans for resident parking permits in the Donaghadee area. (AQW 6614/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to residents parking permits in general, I recently launched the informal consultation process for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in five areas of inner Belfast. Until the outcome of this consultation and the resolution of problems associated with implementation and operation have been dealt with, it is considered unwise to introduce any further schemes

However, in relation to AQW 6615/08, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) sets out my Department's parking policy across the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the Plan period. For the North Down area, the Plan proposes that on-street parking controls are introduced in the urban centre of Bangor, along with more effective enforcement.

My Departments Roads Service has advised that it intends to commence initial parking surveys within residential areas in the centre of Bangor later this year. The areas surveyed will then be prioritised and considered, along with others, for possible inclusion in future residents' parking schemes.

It is not possible at this stage to identify how long it will be before scheme design will start in the North Down area.

In relation to AQW 6613/08, AQW6614/08 and AQW 6616/08, there are presently no plans to introduce residents' parking schemes in Millisle, Donaghadee and Holywood. However, if there is a specific area, at any of these locations, that you wish to be considered for a residents' parking scheme, officials from my Department's Roads Service would be happy to carry out preliminary surveys, to establish the need and priority of such a request.

Parking in Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans for resident parking permits in the Bangor area. (AQW 6615/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to residents parking permits in general, I recently launched the informal consultation process for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in five areas of inner Belfast. Until the outcome of this consultation and the resolution of problems associated with implementation and operation have been dealt with, it is considered unwise to introduce any further schemes

However, in relation to AQW 6615/08, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) sets out my Department's parking policy across the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the Plan period. For the North Down area, the Plan proposes that on-street parking controls are introduced in the urban centre of Bangor, along with more effective enforcement.

My Departments Roads Service has advised that it intends to commence initial parking surveys within residential areas in the centre of Bangor later this year. The areas surveyed will then be prioritised and considered, along with others, for possible inclusion in future residents' parking schemes.

It is not possible at this stage to identify how long it will be before scheme design will start in the North Down area.

In relation to AQW 6613/08, AQW6614/08 and AQW 6616/08, there are presently no plans to introduce residents' parking schemes in Millisle, Donaghadee and Holywood. However, if there is a specific area, at any of these locations, that you wish to be considered for a residents' parking scheme, officials from my Department's Roads Service would be happy to carry out preliminary surveys, to establish the need and priority of such a request.

Parking in Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans for resident parking permits in the Holywood area. (AQW 6616/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to residents parking permits in general, I recently launched the informal consultation process for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in five areas of inner Belfast. Until the outcome of this consultation and the resolution of problems associated with implementation and operation have been dealt with, it is considered unwise to introduce any further schemes

However, in relation to AQW 6615/08, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) sets out my Department's parking policy across the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the Plan period. For the North Down area, the Plan proposes that on-street parking controls are introduced in the urban centre of Bangor, along with more effective enforcement.

My Departments Roads Service has advised that it intends to commence initial parking surveys within residential areas in the centre of Bangor later this year. The areas surveyed will then be prioritised and considered, along with others, for possible inclusion in future residents' parking schemes.

It is not possible at this stage to identify how long it will be before scheme design will start in the North Down area.

In relation to AQW 6613/08, AQW6614/08 and AQW 6616/08, there are presently no plans to introduce residents' parking schemes in Millisle, Donaghadee and Holywood. However, if there is a specific area, at any of these locations, that you wish to be considered for a residents' parking scheme, officials from my Department's Roads Service would be happy to carry out preliminary surveys, to establish the need and priority of such a request.

Equality Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5193/08, to detail his obligations under equality legislation, in relation to illegal signage on lamp standards.

(AQW 6623/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The obligation placed upon my Department's Roads Service by equality legislation, is as specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependents and sexual orientation. To implement this obligation, my Department has put in place an Equality Scheme, which has been approved by the Equality Commission.

Tarmacking of Roads

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide the timescale under planning rules for the completion of tarmacking of roads after houses have been built.

(AQW 6644/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As local roads are a matter for the Department for Regional

Development, your question has been passed to me, as the Minister responsible, for answer.

With regard to AQW 6644, where my Department's Roads Service has determined the streets in a housing development for adoption under The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, all street works are required to be carried out to the satisfaction of the Department within one year from the date on which buildings are first occupied, or such longer period as the Department thinks reasonable.

In relation to AQW 6645/08; (i) there is no specific provision under The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 as to when the first tarmac course needs to be put down in a housing estate; and (ii) current legislation does not specifically require tarmacing (ie surfacing) of streets in housing estates before houses are occupied.

However, Roads Service normally recommends, as a condition of Planning Approval, that no dwellings should be occupied until that part of the service road providing access to the properties occupied, has been constructed to base course, and that the final wearing course should be applied on the completion of each phase of the development.

Tarmacking of Roads

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) when the first tarmac course needs to be put down in a housing estate; and (ii) if planning law dictates that tarmacing of housing estates needs to take place before houses are occupied.

(AQW 6645/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As local roads are a matter for the Department for Regional Development, your question has been passed to me, as the Minister responsible, for answer.

With regard to AQW 6644, where my Department's Roads Service has determined the streets in a housing development for adoption under The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, all street works are required to be carried out to the satisfaction of the Department within one year from the date on which buildings are first occupied, or such longer period as the Department thinks reasonable.

In relation to AQW 6645/08; (i) there is no specific provision under The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 as to when the first tarmac course needs to be put down in a housing estate; and (ii) current legislation does not specifically require tarmacing (ie surfacing) of streets in housing estates before houses are occupied.

However, Roads Service normally recommends, as a condition of Planning Approval, that no dwellings

should be occupied until that part of the service road providing access to the properties occupied, has been constructed to base course, and that the final wearing course should be applied on the completion of each phase of the development.

Road and Water Plans in Randalstown

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any work being carried out by the Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water in Randalstown and the surrounding areas in May 2008. (AQW 6665/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6665/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no work planned in the Randalstown and surrounding area in May 2008. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that it will be commencing construction work on a new trunk watermain on New Street, Randalstown during May. A new pumping main and trunk watermain will also be laid through private lands between Randalstown and Milltown, Antrim between May and October 2008.

With regard to AQW 6667/08, Roads Service officials have advised that they plan to resurface the Crumlin Road between the Largy Road and Ballynadrentragh Road junctions during May 2008. NIW has no work planned for Crumlin and the surrounding areas during May.

With regard to AQW 6669/08, Roads Service officials advise that during May work will continue on the M2 Improvements scheme between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions.

Following the demolition of the Hightown Bridge in early March, construction of the replacement structure will progress at this location. This will involve the construction of new bridge abutments on both the northern and southern sides of the motorway and a new bridge pier in the central reserve.

The other main elements of this scheme that will be undertaken during May include top soiling in the motorway verge between Sandyknowes and Greencastle and the erection of fencing and safety barrier along Derry Road.

Routine maintenance work on the M2 motorway will involve grass cutting, weed control treatments, emergency telephone and communications cabinet cleaning, routine maintenance of structures and localised resurfacing on the A8(M) on the approach to Sandyknowes junction.

NIW has no work planned for Mallusk and the surrounding areas during May.

Road and Water Plans in Crumlin

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any work being carried out by the Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water in Crumlin and the surrounding areas in May 2008. (AQW 6667/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6665/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no work planned in the Randalstown and surrounding area in May 2008. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that it will be commencing construction work on a new trunk watermain on New Street, Randalstown during May. A new pumping main and trunk watermain will also be laid through private lands between Randalstown and Milltown, Antrim between May and October 2008.

With regard to AQW 6667/08, Roads Service officials have advised that they plan to resurface the Crumlin Road between the Largy Road and Ballynadrentragh Road junctions during May 2008. NIW has no work planned for Crumlin and the surrounding areas during May.

With regard to AQW 6669/08, Roads Service officials advise that during May work will continue on the M2 Improvements scheme between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions.

Following the demolition of the Hightown Bridge in early March, construction of the replacement structure will progress at this location. This will involve the construction of new bridge abutments on both the northern and southern sides of the motorway and a new bridge pier in the central reserve.

The other main elements of this scheme that will be undertaken during May include top soiling in the motorway verge between Sandyknowes and Greencastle and the erection of fencing and safety barrier along Derry Road.

Routine maintenance work on the M2 motorway will involve grass cutting, weed control treatments, emergency telephone and communications cabinet cleaning, routine maintenance of structures and localised resurfacing on the A8(M) on the approach to Sandyknowes junction.

NIW has no work planned for Mallusk and the surrounding areas during May.

Road and Water Plans in Mallusk

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any work being carried out by the Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water

in Mallusk and the surrounding areas in May 2008.
(AQW 6669/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6665/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no work planned in the Randalstown and surrounding area in May 2008. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that it will be commencing construction work on a new trunk watermain on New Street, Randalstown during May. A new pumping main and trunk watermain will also be laid through private lands between Randalstown and Milltown, Antrim between May and October 2008.

With regard to AQW 6667/08, Roads Service officials have advised that they plan to resurface the Crumlin Road between the Largy Road and Ballynadrentragh Road junctions during May 2008. NIW has no work planned for Crumlin and the surrounding areas during May.

With regard to AQW 6669/08, Roads Service officials advise that during May work will continue on the M2 Improvements scheme between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions.

Following the demolition of the Hightown Bridge in early March, construction of the replacement structure will progress at this location. This will involve the construction of new bridge abutments on both the northern and southern sides of the motorway and a new bridge pier in the central reserve.

The other main elements of this scheme that will be undertaken during May include top soiling in the motorway verge between Sandyknowes and Greencastle and the erection of fencing and safety barrier along Derry Road.

Routine maintenance work on the M2 motorway will involve grass cutting, weed control treatments, emergency telephone and communications cabinet cleaning, routine maintenance of structures and localised resurfacing on the A8(M) on the approach to Sandyknowes junction.

NIW has no work planned for Mallusk and the surrounding areas during May.

Parking Tickets

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of parking tickets that have been issued following (i) failure to purchase a pay and display ticket; and (ii) the expiry of a pay and display ticket in car parks in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6670/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service assumed responsibility

for on-street parking enforcement following the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) at the end of October 2006. The numbers of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) that have been issued since then for 'parked in a pay and display car-park without clearly displaying a valid pay and display ticket' and 'parked after the expiry of time paid for in a pay and display car-park' are as follows:-

	End- October '06 / 31 March '07	1 April '07 / 31 March '08
Parked in P&D car-park without clearly displaying a valid P&D ticket	5,119	20,306
Parked after the expiry of time paid for in a pay and display car-park	2,610	8,968

I do not have figures for PCN's issued prior to my Department taking responsibility for on-street parking enforcement.

Disabled Parking

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to increase the number of Road Service car parking spaces which are reserved for holders of a disabled persons 'blue badge'.
(AQW 6671/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no specific plans to increase the number of parking spaces allocated as disabled parking bays. Officials are, however, happy to consider all requests for such spaces.

The current policy on the provision of Disabled Parking Bays, first introduced in May 2002 is described in a public information leaflet entitled, "Disabled Parking Bays – Information for Applicants" which is available from Roads Service local offices and via the Roads Service website (www.roadsni.gov.uk/disabled_parking_leaflet.pdf).

EU Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the EU funding surrendered by his Department in each of the last 2 financial years.
(AQW 6674/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development has not surrendered any EU funding in the last two years.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the traffic calming measures that have been put in place in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Portadown, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6700/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service collates the details of traffic calming measures by Council area. Schemes implemented in Banbridge District Council and Craigavon Borough Council areas in each of the last three financial years are provided in the tables below.

BANBRIDGE

Year	Location	Features
2005/06	Hillsborough Road, Dromore	Gateway features, central hatching, right-turn lanes and road markings
	Gallows Street (upper) and Jubilee Road, Dromore	Gateway features, kerb build-outs and road markings
	Meeting Street, Dromore	New signs, anti-skid surfacing and sheltered parking
	Huntly Road, Banbridge	Central hatching, traffic islands, right-turning lanes and mini-roundabout
	Peggy's Loanin, Banbridge	Central hatching and right-turn lanes
	Newry Road, Banbridge	Sheltered parking, central hatching and pedestrian islands
2006/07	Moneyslane village	Gateway features and road markings
	Scarva Street, Banbridge	Kerb build-outs, sheltered parking and road markings
	Lawrencetown Village, Banbridge	Gateway features, road markings and short length of footpath
2007/08	Fort Street, Banbridge	Gateway, central hatching, traffic islands, mini-roundabout and speed ramps
	Hilltown Road, Rathfriland	Gateway and traffic island
	Castleview, Gilford	Speed ramps

CRAIGAVON

Year	Location	Features
2005/06	Ashgrove Road, Portadown	Traffic islands, central hatching and gateway feature
	Sloan Street, Lurgan	Traffic islands, right-turn lanes and central hatching
	Hill Street, Lurgan	Road markings and sheltered parking
	Gilford Road, Portadown	Junction improvements and right-turn markings
	Churchill / Woodside Estate, Portadown	Speed ramps
	Scotch Street, Portadown	Gateway features, central hatching, right-turn lanes and road markings
2006/07	Lake Street, Lurgan	Gateway feature, central hatching, pedestrian islands and mini-roundabouts
	Drumnacanvey Village, Portadown	Gateway features and road markings
	Meadowbrook Estate, Craigavon	Speed ramps and tables
	Waringstown	Gateway features, build-outs and sheltered parking
2007/08	Kernan Road, Portadown	Gateway and central hatching
	Gibsons Hill, Lurgan	Gateways and central hatching
	Mourne Road, Lurgan	Speed ramps

Road Works Projects

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps he is taking to coordinate different road works projects undertaken by different utilities to ensure that disruption to traffic and damage to the road surface is minimised. (AQW 6702/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides a legislative framework for street works activities by undertakers (including public utilities), and for works for roads purposes, to the extent that these must be co-ordinated with street works.

Utility providers are required to register their intention to carry out street works with my Department's Roads Service for the purpose of co-ordinating street works and related matters in accordance with a Code of Practice prepared by

the Northern Ireland Road Authority and Utilities Committee (NIRAUC) and the Department.

Co-ordination of street works is facilitated through a computerised register, the Northern Ireland Streetworks Register And Notification System (NISRANS), which provides an effective basis for conveying information to all concerned about proposed work. In addition, Roads Service officials, at various levels, are in daily contact with utility providers to agree traffic management plans and to adjust utility project plans.

However, Roads Service considers that the current regulatory regime could be improved to help maintain the flow of traffic on the road network and is currently in the process of introducing additional legislation similar to that being introduced in England and Wales. The new legislation (The Street Works (Amendment) (NI) Order 2007) will include powers for Roads Service to charge and issue permits to utilities for the carrying out of street works, to direct the dates and routes by which works are to be undertaken, as well as powers to impose an embargo on further works for up to 5 years following substantial road or street works.

Vandalism to Railway and Bus Stations

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of vandalism to (i) railway stations; and (ii) bus shelters, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6703/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Train Stations: Northern Ireland Railways have supplied me with the following figures of vandalism costs to railway stations over the last five years.

2003/04	£22,569
2004/05	£16,000
2005/06	£18,852
2006/07	£18,394
2007/08	£3,130

NIR are not aware of any particular trend in reduction of acts of vandalism to explain the decrease in 2007/08. They think it may be linked to some of their local managers delaying rectification work to avoid nugatory expenditure, due to the implementation of an extensive programme of works at railway stations to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Bus Shelters:

In January 2001 Roads Service and the majority of district councils entered into a 15-year contract with Adshel (the bus shelter provider) for the provision

of approximately 1500 bus shelters throughout the council areas involved. The provision and maintenance of these shelters are funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to the Department. The contract covers the vast majority of bus shelters in the North and the Department has no knowledge of the costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out their contractual commitments.

In addition to the above contract, Adshel installed a small number of bus shelters for Translink. This was funded through the Rural Transport Fund and under the terms of the contract Translink paid for any related vandalism costs. Translink have supplied the information on these vandalism costs as set out below. Information for 2003/04 to 2004/05 is not yet available as Translink require further time to interrogate their previous accounting system. This information will be provided as soon as available.

2003/04	N/A
2004/05	N/A
2005/06	£1,622
2006/07	£165
2007/08	£2,200

Traffic Congestion in Waringstown

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will carry out an assessment of traffic congestion at the junction of Mill Hill in Waringstown, with a view to putting measures in place to end the frequent rush hour gridlock at this junction. (AQW 6704/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in common with similar locations, traffic using the Mill Hill junction in Waringstown experiences a degree of delay at peak times.

I understand that you have also written directly to Roads Service officials on this issue and that they have agreed to conduct a further review of the traffic conditions at this junction and will advise you of the outcome when this is completed.

Hydrogen Technology for Buses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to introduce buses fuelled by hydrogen technology rather than fossil fuels. (AQW 6709/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: There are no plans, at present, to introduce buses fuelled by hydrogen technology.

Rail Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the progress in the development of the Derry/Londonderry - Coleraine railway line; (ii) whether a dedicated project team has been appointed; and (iii) the resources available to the project team. (AQW 6710/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The first step in the development of the Coleraine to Derry Track relay project has been taken. Translink have produced a draft Project Initiation Document (PID) and the final document is expected to be presented to the Department for approval in early June.

The PID will contain a proposed structure for the project management team.

The PID will request £980k of funding to enable the feasibility study and economic appraisal stages of the project to be taken forward by the project team. The Business Case will then be put to the Department for consideration.

Rail Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the progress in considering European Union funding opportunities in relation to cross border rail links in the North West; and (ii) the discussions that have taken place with the Republic of Ireland on a North West cross border rail link. (AQW 6711/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My immediate priority is to improve rail services in the North, and the Programme for Government sets out plans to commit over £137 million for capital investment in the railway network in the years 2008/09 to 2010/11.

There are at present no plans to extend the railway network and therefore no applications have been made for European Funding for a cross border rail link in the North West. I have, however, agreed to a study that will consider long-term social, physical and economic redevelopment of the railway throughout the north-west. Later this month, I intend to bring that to the attention of the North/South Ministerial Council and to suggest that, when available, the study's findings are shared with the Council.

Water and Roads Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the procedures in place to ensure co-ordination between the Water Service and Roads Service when work is required to upgrade or replace facilities which require work on roads. (AQW 6731/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 ("the Order") provides a legislative framework for street works activities by undertakers (public and private utilities including Northern Ireland Water), as well as for works for road purposes, to the extent that these must be co-ordinated with street works.

Under Articles 16, 19 and 20 of the Order, my Department issued the first edition of the Code of Practice for the co-ordination of street works and works for road purposes and related matters on 18 March 2002; the 2nd edition was introduced on 31 January 2005. This document, prepared by the Northern Ireland Road Authority and Utilities Committee (NIRAUC) and the Department, provides practical guidance on a wide range of responsibilities for my Department's Roads Service and undertakers in relation to street or road works.

Utility providers are required to register their intention to carry out street works with Roads Service for the purpose of co-ordinating street works and related matters in accordance with the Code of Practice. Co-ordination of street works is facilitated through a computerised register, the Northern Ireland Streetworks Register And Notification System (NISRANS), which provides an effective basis for conveying information to all concerned about proposed work. In addition, Roads Service officials, at various levels, are in daily contact with utility providers to agree traffic management plans and to adjust utility project plans. Roads Service aims to achieve co-ordination with the utility undertakers and balance the potentially conflicting interests of road users and utility customers.

Notwithstanding the above, Roads Service considers that the current regulatory regime could be further improved to help maintain the flow of traffic on the network. It is in the process of bringing in additional legislation similar to that being introduced in England and Wales.

The new legislation (The Street Works (Amendment) (NI) Order 2007) will include powers for Roads Service to charge and issue permits to utilities for the carrying out of street works, to direct the dates and routes by which works are to be undertaken and to impose an embargo on further works for up to 5 years following substantial road or street works.

Water and Roads Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the procedures in place between the Roads and Water Services and private companies to co-ordinate work required on roads. (AQW 6732/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (“the Order”) provides a legislative framework for street works activities by undertakers (public and private utilities including Northern Ireland Water), as well as for works for road purposes, to the extent that these must be co-ordinated with street works.

Under Articles 16, 19 and 20 of the Order, my Department issued the first edition of the Code of Practice for the co-ordination of street works and works for road purposes and related matters on 18 March 2002; the 2nd edition was introduced on 31 January 2005. This document, prepared by the Northern Ireland Road Authority and Utilities Committee (NIRAUC) and the Department, provides practical guidance on a wide range of responsibilities for my Department’s Roads Service and undertakers in relation to street or road works.

Utility providers are required to register their intention to carry out street works with Roads Service for the purpose of co-ordinating street works and related matters in accordance with the Code of Practice. Co-ordination of street works is facilitated through a computerised register, the Northern Ireland Streetworks Register And Notification System (NISRANS), which provides an effective basis for conveying information to all concerned about proposed work. In addition, Roads Service officials, at various levels, are in daily contact with utility providers to agree traffic management plans and to adjust utility project plans. Roads Service aims to achieve co-ordination with the utility undertakers and balance the potentially conflicting interests of road users and utility customers.

Notwithstanding the above, Roads Service considers that the current regulatory regime could be further improved to help maintain the flow of traffic on the network. It is in the process of bringing in additional legislation similar to that being introduced in England and Wales.

The new legislation (The Street Works (Amendment) (NI) Order 2007) will include powers for Roads Service to charge and issue permits to utilities for the carrying out of street works, to direct the dates and routes by which works are to be undertaken and to impose an embargo on further works for up to 5 years following substantial road or street works.

Disabled Parking

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of residential disabled car parking spaces, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6735/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service does not maintain records of disabled parking bays with a defined category for “residential spaces”. They are simply categorised as being either “on-street” or “off-street” and, unfortunately, these records are not maintained by constituency or district council area. However, I can advise that there are 1,789 (figure to end of April) on-street disabled parking spaces across the North.

I should point out that, while Roads Service provides disabled parking bays in town and city centres and in residential areas, these bays cannot be reserved by individuals, but may be used by any Blue Badge holder.

Disability Targets

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the targets his Department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in his Department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6748/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development does not have specific targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. The Department nevertheless seeks to ensure that people with a disability suffer no detriment in recruitment and advancement and that reasonable adjustments are made across its full range of employment practices.

Free Travel Over 60s

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the discussions he has had with his counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales in relation to reciprocal free travel entitlements for people over the age of 60. (AQW 6753/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have had no such discussions. Any arrangement for the reciprocal recognition of concessionary passes would raise financial as well as operational and technical issues. As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process I bid for resources to make changes to the North’s concessionary fares scheme, some of which would have had the effect of bringing aspects of the scheme here more closely into line with provision in Britain. The Executive decided to make resources available to

extend free travel to those over 60 travelling within the North.

Road Safety Issues

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's plans to up-grade the Drumagarner Road, Kilrea, between the Lismoyle Road and Hervey Hill Road junction, to address road safety issues. (AQW 6772/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service has advised that a traffic calming scheme was carried out in Drumagarner village in 2004 and in early 2008 a footway was constructed between the edge of the settlement at Drumagarner and the pedestrian entrance to the GAA pitch. Both of these schemes were carried out in the interests of road safety. Roads Service has no plans to carry out further improvements at this time.

However, I can advise that Roads Service will carry out an Initial Assessment at this location, to consider the need for a minor improvement scheme. Upon completion of this assessment, my officials will contact you with the results.

Business Class Flights

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of times he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister since assuming office in May 2007; and (ii) the cost incurred by his Department for this travel, and to confirm if flying business class is standard practice or whether he is given the option of flying business class. (AQW 6776/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have flown business class on one occasion in my official capacity since assuming ministerial office in May 2007. The cost of that return flight was £466.10.

Flying business class is not standard practice in the Department and on the three other occasions that I have flown on official business, I travelled economy class.

SmartPass Fares

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to extend the provision of half-fare entitlement to concessionary SmartPass holders, to include return as well as single fares. (AQW 6782/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have asked that officials consider the potential options for removing restrictions relating to the purchase of half

fares if that can be done without compromising the security of the scheme.

Rail Services

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have used the Bangor to Belfast train service in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 6873/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The number of rail passengers using the Bangor to Belfast train service in each of the last 5 years was:

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Bangor Line	1,544,386	1,517,315	1,860,752	1,956,801	2,064,232

Rock Excavation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures will be taken to ensure that homes in the vicinity of the A1 at Cloughogue will be protected from damage from rock blasting activities, and in the event of such damage, what action will be taken to compensate those affected. (AQW 6913/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that, in general, rock excavation by blasting requires adherence with particular safety measures to ensure that the operation is undertaken so as to avoid damage, including damage to residential properties in the vicinity.

The rock blasting activities to which you refer, are being undertaken as part of the Design Build Finance and Operate Contract for the construction of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloughogue dual carriageway. Under the terms of the contract, the DBFO Company is required to adhere to all the rules, guidelines and safety procedures contained in BS5607:1998. This is the relevant British Standard, which, among other things, sets target impact levels to avoid damage to nearby property. Furthermore the DBFO Company is also required to comply with the requirements of Relevant Authorities, in this instance the Environmental Health Department of Newry and Mourne District Council, which were reflected in the Environmental Statement for the scheme, published in November 2004. These are more demanding than the British Standard.

In light of these contractual requirements, Roads Service has assured me that appropriate measures are being taken to ensure that homes in the vicinity of the A1 at Cloughogue are protected from damage.

In the unlikely event of damage being caused to residential properties by the rock blasting operation, under the term of the Contract, it will be a matter for the Contractor, to deal with any claim which may arise.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which her Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6433/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): The Department for Social Development website contains an extensive range of publications and downloads of internal and external publications which can be counted. However, there is no mechanism in place to compare the distribution of the full range of electronic publications and correspondence against hard copies.

Conor Rise and Conor House

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the improvement schemes that have been implemented in the (a) Conor Rise; and (b) Conor Close areas of West Belfast, since its development; and (ii) the future improvement schemes that are planned, including the scheduled dates. (AQW 6524/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not readily available from the date of initial construction. However, the following table details the improvement works which have been carried out since 1998/99.

Date	Improvement Work	Location
1998-1999	External Cyclical Maintenance & Repainting Scheme	Conor Rise, Conor House
2002-2003	External Maintenance Works to Canopies. Cladding, etc	Conor Rise, Shaws Road
2002-2003	External Cyclical Maintenance & Repainting Scheme	Conor Rise, Shaws Road
2003-2004	Installation of Mechanical Ventilation Systems	Conor House, Shaws Road
2005-2006	Cosy Homes Scheme (Phase 2) Replacement of existing heating systems with new Gas Heating Systems	Conor Rise

Date	Improvement Work	Location
2007-2008	External Cyclical Maintenance & Internal/External Repainting Scheme	Conor House
2007-2008	Up-grading works including work under the Disability Discrimination Act, Security (CCTV) and external grounds works	Conor House, Conor Rise
Each year	Annual Heating Systems Servicing and remedial works	All properties

Since Conor Close is a new part of the development it has not required any improvement works as yet. Ark Housing is currently finalizing its 10 year cyclical and planned maintenance works programme for its entire stock and Connor Close will be included in that exercise.

NI Housing Executive

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the reasons for job cuts in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and (ii) her plans to introduce pay increases for current and remaining staff. (AQW 6551/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, like all Government Departments and agencies, is required to deliver a 5% efficiency saving per year over the next three years in relation to its administrative costs. For the past two years however the Housing Executive has been working on a Modernising Programme which will deliver economies through amalgamating "back office" functions into larger centres, whilst maintaining the level of service at district level.

Pay within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is governed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services on the basis of its National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service. Any pay increases are agreed at national level by the National Joint Council, subject to the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Departmental Legal Costs

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of money her Department has spent on (i) legal costs due to challenges in court; and (ii) compensation settlements, since May 2007. (AQW 6582/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The precise information that you have requested is not separately identifiable from my Department's records.

However, I can advise that between May 2007 and April 2008, the Department has incurred £706,101

in respect to total legal costs, covering a wide range of issues from Appeals Tribunals, Employment Tribunals, Enforcement of Judgements, vesting order issues, Public Liability cases and various property related matters.

In the same period, my Department made compensation payments amounting to £418,731, which is primarily for Social Security Agency customers arising from issues around benefit payments and is administered by the Agency and not the Court Service. In addition an amount of £109,752 was paid in respect to Personal Injury compensation cases.

Departmental Websites

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the websites that come under her Department's responsibility and to detail the (i) cost of maintaining them; and (ii) number of visitors to these sites, since devolution. (AQW 6607/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the number of websites that come under the responsibility of DSD. The table includes the number of visitors since devolution as well as the number of page views. Information on page views has been included because visitors to sites are no longer seen as an accurate form of measurement.

It is not possible to provide a figure on the cost of maintaining each site as a disaggregated figure for site maintenance is not held.

WEBSITES THAT COME UNDER THE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Website	Visitors	Page views
www.dsdni.gov.uk	547,050	2,459,718

Website	Visitors	Page views
www.stopbenefitfraudni.gov.uk	10,588	71,611

Connswater Housing

Ms Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the financial assistance that has been made available for the provision of triple glazing in the Connswater Mews/Grove area of Belfast, which is situated at the lowest point of the flight path into George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQW 6622/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Connswater Housing owns 31 single glazed dwellings in this area. Under normal circumstances the windows would not be due for replacement with double glazing until 2014. Connswater Housing will, however, be undertaking a condition survey of all its stock. The survey will start with these particular dwellings and the Association has indicated that it may be possible to bring the window replacements forward. Such works are funded by the Association itself so no funding has to be made available by my Department for this purpose.

Housing Executive Land in East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the East Antrim constituency; and (ii) her plans for this land. (AQW 6628/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is as follows:

District	Location	Site Area (HA)	Programmed for transfer to Housing Association	Transfer to Surplus Land Schedule	Retain for future use
N'abbey 1	Shore Road	0.89		√	
N'abbey 1	Old Irish Highway, Rathcoole	0.33			√
N'abbey 1	Derrycoole Way, Rathcoole	0.59			√
N'abbey 1	Derrycoole Pk, Rathcoole	0.48			√
N'abbey 1	High St, Bawnmore Ph 1	0.05	√		
N'abbey 1	Bawnmore Place Site 1	0.33			√
N'abbey 1	Old Mill Drive	0.11			√
N'abbey 1	Glanroy Crescent	0.40			√
N'abbey 2	Ballyduff Road	1.15		√	
N'abbey 2	Ards Drive	0.83			√

District	Location	Site Area (HA)	Programmed for transfer to Housing Association	Transfer to Surplus Land Schedule	Retain for future use
Carrick	Dunluskin Site (1)	5.45		√	
Carrick	Dunluskin Site (2)	18.00		√	
Carrick	Oakwood Road	3.63		√	
Carrick	Glenfield Estate Site 1	1.45		√	
Carrick	Irish Quarter West	0.14			√
Carrick	McKeens Avenue	0.35	√		
Carrick	Windmill Avenue	0.29	√		
Carrick	Eden Orlits	1.00	√		
Carrick	Prince Andrew Way	2.70		√	
Carrick	Lower Woodburn	1.70		√	
Carrick	Islandmagee Rd, W'head	0.71		√	
Carrick	30 Davys Street	0.02			√
Larne	Blackcave North (2)	4.01		√	
Larne	Blackcave North (1)	6.23		√	
Larne	Ashvale Pk, Islandmagee	0.55			√
Larne	Glenvale Road, Glynn	0.11		√	
Larne	Seacliff Rd/Channel View	2.39		√	
Larne	Blackcave Park	0.60		√	
Larne	Kintyre Road, Antiville	2.14		√	
Larne	Linn Road Flats	0.28		√	
Larne	Newpark	0.08			√
Larne	West Street Site 2	0.02			√

Renewing Communities Fund

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of funding awarded through the Renewing Communities Fund in each year since it was launched. (AQW 6633/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The amounts allocated through the Renewing Communities Fund for my Department for the years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 are detailed in the tables which have been placed in the library along with a separate table showing other Departments allocations. These were projected spends for the financial years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008. Full details of actual spends are the responsibility of each relevant sponsoring Department.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development if she intends to regulate the policy

on the 'disabled facilities grant' to put people with a disability on a par with children. (AQW 6729/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since the Disabled Facilities Grant means test for adaptations for children was abolished, my Department has been working with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to identify potential ways of simplifying the process and to ensure that all people with disabilities are able to get any necessary adaptations carried out in their homes.

Disability Targets

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the targets her Department has set in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in her Department over the next 5 years. (AQW 6749/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Renewable Energy

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on funded schemes supporting renewable energy for private use. (AQW 6805/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has overall responsibility for renewable energy. Money from the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund was used by my department to install 2,567 solar panels in social and private housing from 2006 to 2008. This year, I am co-funding a £550,000 pilot project with Northern Ireland Electricity to test a number of renewable energy technologies, mostly in hard-to-treat homes in rural areas. This will help to identify whether such technologies are a viable, cost-effective alternative to oil or gas heating in the longer term.

Modernisation Fund

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline (i) the decision making process for allocations from the Modernisation Fund; and (ii) the measures in place to ensure fair distribution of allocations throughout the region. (AQW 6845/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Modernisation Fund Capital Programme has a three stage assessment process.

- An independent desk based assessment against programme objectives produces a priority listing.
- Review, consideration and confirmation of the recommended prioritisation by an advisory panel chaired by a senior official from my Department's Voluntary and Community Unit and including representatives from the DSD Development Offices, Disability Advisory Services DEL and Groundwork Northern Ireland a voluntary and community sector organisation with experience of capital project development.
- Projects confirmed by the advisory panel are subject to economic appraisal which if positive will result in the issue of a contract for funding.

The Modernisation Fund Capital Programme does not allocate funding on a geographical basis. Decisions are made on the basis of the application's merit against the programme criteria and overall policy objectives.

The professional approach followed during the programme design and assessment processes and the oversight role of the Advisory Panel will ensure a fair distribution of funding under this Programme which when it closed to application on 19 October 2007 had received 475 applications with a total value of £195 million.

National Carers' Strategy

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether the review into support provision for carers was started, as indicated by the Minister, on Thursday 6 May. (AQW 7005/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The purpose of the review is to examine the support for carers in an holistic way following on from the review of the National Carers' Strategy, the findings of which are due to be published in early June. Work has commenced on establishing the terms of reference for the review.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Yellow Pages

Mr Wells asked the Assembly Commission to detail the plans it has to review ordering future supplies of the Yellow Pages for offices in Parliament Buildings. (AQW 6531/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): The Yellow Pages is a commercial directory which is delivered to Parliament Buildings every year. The number of copies delivered in previous years was in the region of 180, this number allowed for a copy for each of the following;

- All Members offices;
- Main party offices;
- Committee Chairpersons office;
- OFMDFM offices;
- Ministerial Offices;
- Directors;
- Speakers Office and Special Advisor;
- 2 for the library;
- Entrance Doors (North, South, East, West and Annexe C);
- The Control Room;
- The Library;
- The pay phone;
- 8 Spare

For the incoming year, in an attempt to minimize the order, Building Management Branch will establish the number of copies of Yellow Pages required by making contact with the main Party offices, Members and staff via email. It is anticipated that the number of copies required will not exceed 40. As all building users can access the internet there is the facility

to search the directories on line and staff will be encouraged to avail of this.

Any old copies of the yellow pages are taken away at the time of distribution to be recycled.

New Search Facility

Mr Wells asked the Assembly Commission to outline the reasons why the recently constructed search facility was not designed to reflect the architectural style of Parliament Buildings; and to advise if there are any plans for further work on the structure. (AQW 6538/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): In order to fulfil one of the recommendations of the review of security, the Assembly Commission agreed to introduce a facility for searching visitors to Parliament Buildings externally.

Planning permission was sought for a temporary facility to be located at the Glen East entrance to Parliament Buildings. The temporary nature of the facility is to allow for a replacement search arrangement as part of the proposed new build project.

Advice from the Planning Service and from the Environment and Heritage Service was that the building should be treated as a temporary facility and should not try to compete with Parliament Buildings in any way. With the possible exception of a rain canopy at the entrance, the Commission has no plans for further work on the structure.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 23 May 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Good Relations District Council Plans

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the criteria currently used to determine programme spend for the delivery of the Good Relations District Council plans. (AQW 6348/08)

**The First Minister and deputy First Minister
(Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr M McGuinness):**

District Councils submit annual good relations action plans to OFMDFM. The criteria for funding contained within the action plans are that each participating council endorses an explicit policy statement to develop a local community relations programme and that the programme would command cross-political support within council. The programme aims are:

- increasing cross-community relationships and co-operation;
- promoting greater mutual understanding; and
- increasing appreciation of cultural diversity.

It is also a requirement that plans are based on good relations issues as identified through the good relations audits and/or research outcomes undertaken by each District Council.

It is important that those identified local needs and local actions are prioritised accordingly to reflect the issues within the respective district council area. As the programmes have developed in line with government policy on good relations, the programmes should therefore incorporate both internal and outward-facing actions designed to mainstream good relations within all Councils' procedures and practices.

Traditionally, the overall funding allocated against this work was approximately £2m per annum. However, we have additional funding of almost £7.5m over the next 3 years from 2008/2011 provided to address the divisions within our society; total investment will therefore be approximately £29m, to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all.

A key element of these investment proposals includes a significant increase over the period to promote inclusion and integration at local level and there are therefore potentially significant increases in funding available for Councils' good relations programmes.

We are currently identifying what additional work is needed. We will review the criteria to ensure that identified needs are addressed and to bring the criteria into line with an agreed new strategy.

Causes of Poverty

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the action it is taking to identify the causes of poverty. (AQW 6418/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:
In seeking to identify the causes of poverty here, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has and will continue to contribute to a range of government research and survey programmes, relevant to poverty and the identification of risk factors associated with poverty, including:

- an analysis of the Continuous Household Survey which has covered information on the characteristics of households falling into the bottom 30% of the income distribution;
- part-funding of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland', which was published in November 2006; and
- part-funding of other relevant surveys such as the Family Resources Survey and the Expenditure and Food Survey through OFMDFM's Equality and Social Need Steering Group.

The risk factors identified to date are similar to those identified in UK research studies and include factors related to poor education, unemployment, wage levels, health and disability and household type.

Sustainable Development Forum

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a statement on the role of a Sustainable Development Forum. (AQW 6422/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The appropriate means of encouraging civic participation and communication is presently being explored and one strand of this work is the potential role of a Sustainable Development Forum. Consideration is being given to existing relationships between our Department and other organisations to ensure delivery of sustainability objectives is achieved on a best value for money basis.

Departmental Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which their Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically. (AQW 6434/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The department encourages branches to publish documents online as part of its policy on electronic publishing. However, we do not have mechanisms in place to monitor the extent to which the Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, is carried out electronically.

Civic Forum

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to give a timescale within which it expects to make an announcement on whether to reconstitute the Civic Forum. (AQW 6636/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The three-year term of office of the original Civic Forum membership has expired and, as the social and economic environment here has changed considerably since the Civic Forum first met in October 2000, a review has been commissioned to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of its structure, operation and membership, and to make recommendations on the most appropriate mechanism and arrangements for engaging with, and obtaining the views of, civic society on social, economic and cultural matters.

The review is now under way and it is expected to report to us later this year.

Fair Employment Laws

Mr K Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when legislation will be introduced to ensure that current fair employment laws extend to all employers. (AQW 6890/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Review of the Fair Employment Monitoring Regulations is an ongoing commitment. Review of these Regulations and fair employment legislation generally will be considered as part of the ongoing review of equality legislation.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has a statutory role in reviewing equality legislation, and is currently considering fair employment employer duties and monitoring and reviews. We understand that the Commission will be writing formally to the Department soon about these issues

Fair Employment Laws

Mr K Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to re-affirm its commitment to fair employment law and its enforcement. (AQW 6892/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion and makes provision for monitoring the religious composition of the workforce here. We are firmly committed to promoting equality of opportunity between persons of different religious beliefs. Enforcement of the Order is the responsibility of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**Departmental Publications**

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which her Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, are carried out electronically. (AQW 6750/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): All DARD business areas are aware of the need to monitor and reduce paper usage and to implement electronic methods of delivery wherever possible.

The extent to which the Department monitors internal and external correspondence and the mechanisms used to do so varies between individual business areas.

The general approach taken by the Department is to provide an electronic response to any requests received by e-mail (unless the requestor states otherwise). The same approach applies to publications where individuals/organisations will receive documents electronically if they have provided an e-mail address. Publications are also accessible to the wider public via the Department's internet web-site.

The Department monitors stationery usage (including paper) as part of its Waste Management Action Plan which is aimed at promoting the reduction/recycling of all office stationery.

Sub Regional Community Networks

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to confirm if she will undertake to review (i) the role; and (ii) the number of, sub regional networks funded by her Department, in light of the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 6764/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Regional Sub Networks (RSN's) are voluntary member organisations who in turn are members of the Rural Community Network (RCN). They receive funding from my Department to provide a service which we purchase under contract – DARD is not the sole funder. It is not therefore within my Departments remit to review their role or number. That is a matter for the RCN and the RSN's and I am

aware that they have commenced this work The Rural Community Network in partnership with the Sub-regional Rural Support Network's is implementing a project entitled 'Managing Positive Change'. The project which is being funded through the Department for Social Development's Modernisation Fund (from April 2007 to March 2009), challenges the Networking Infrastructure to critically explore modernisation and to act on the findings and recommendations made by the Taskforce for Voluntary and Community organisations. A Project Group has been established to take forward this work and the Review of Public Administration will be taken into account. The Department is represented on this Project Group and I am kept advised on progress.

Sub Regional Community Networks

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, for each of the last 5 financial years, the amount of funding provided to each of the 12 sub regional community networks.
(AQW 6765/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Funding to the 12 sub regional community networks in the last 5 financial years, from DARD, is as outlined in the table below. Please note that the figures for the 07/08 financial year are not yet complete as the final claims for that period are currently being processed.

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
NORTH ANTRIM	£56,175.00	£51,400.00	£52,182.25	£54,508.08	£42,932.06
ROSA	£60,869.25	£60,695.00	£61,877.25	£63,007.19	£36,830.03
COSTA	£40,000.00	£42,000.00	£41,785.25	£46,479.43	£38,274.37
FERMANAGH	£53,437.13	£56,459.05	£57,257.25	£61,872.75	£43,629.76
CWSAN	£51,157.00	£52,000.00	£51,454.37	£57,554.21	£42,509.33
EAST DOWN	£66,701.25	£65,000.00	£66,182.25	£73,145.78	£53,498.30
OAKLEAF	£53,567.08	£68,000.00	£68,734.25	£67,482.36	£42,532.49
SARN	£41,415.05	£39,091.95	£46,529.27	£47,795.16	£38,956.99
OMAGH	£49,492.82	£51,085.79	£44,756.44	£57,754.22	£47,597.66
ROMAL	£49,008.26	£49,450.00	£49,699.30	£54,766.91	£39,432.62
TADA	£50,000.00	£54,374.00	£54,471.95	£57,661.18	£37,216.44
STRABANE	£48,195.00	£50,000.00	£50,752.50	£56,994.01	£42,654.54
	£620,017.84	£639,555.79	£645,682.33	£699,021.28	£506,064.59

Sub Regional Community Networks

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plans to fund the 12 sub regional networks. (AQW 6766/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current contracts of funding to the 12 Regional Sub Networks (RSN's) expire on 30th June 2008. My Department are currently awaiting requests to extend these contracts until 31st March 2009. If these requests are approved, any funding beyond March 2009 will be considered in the context of a Community Development Framework which my Department intends to have in place early next year.

Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide (i) an update on the progress made in carrying out a review on the Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme; and (ii) a timescale within which it will be published. (AQW 6767/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I can confirm that officials from my Department met with staff from the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate on 1 May 2008 to discuss and agree on 'Terms of Reference' for the evaluation of the Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme. Following that meeting, tender documentation was issued to a number of select consultants on 9 May with a closing date for receipt of tenders by 30 May 2008. The evaluation will assess in more detail the positive outcomes for the local rural communities and the wider rural population, and the final report is expected by Friday, 22 August 2008.

National Fallen Stock Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the financial impact that the National Fallen Stock Scheme has had on farmers; and to detail her plans to introduce a scheme where individual farmers do not have to opt in. (AQW 6785/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The National Fallen Stock Company (NFSCo) is owned by the English, Scottish, Welsh and the Northern Agriculture Departments. It was set up in response to the EU By-Products Regulation prohibiting the on-farm burial of fallen farm animals. To ease the transition Government committed a total of £20 million to the National Fallen Stock Scheme

(NFSS), to offset part of the cost of disposal to farmers spread over the first four years of the Scheme. DARD's contribution is £3.2 million.

To date over 11,200 farmers from here have chosen to join the Scheme and to benefit from the subsidy, however, other legal options for disposal include independent collection and approved kennels.

Government funding is due to finish in November 2008. My officials are currently considering the options and will brief me in the coming weeks.

Colony Collapse Disorder

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any plans she has to contribute to the £8 million funding identified by Defra for research into Colony Collapse Disorder over the next five years. (AQW 6808/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Defra has not identified any additional budget for research into bee health issues. While a request for funding of some £8m was received by Defra from the British Beekeepers' Association for research into a variety of bee diseases, no funds have been made available at this time.

There is no evidence to suggest that Colony Collapse Disorder has reached Britain, or the island of Ireland.

Farm on Ballyroney Road, Katesbridge

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5982/08, to detail the reasons why departmental staff did not visit the farm between December 2007 and April 2008. (AQW 6836/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The only outstanding piece of work on this farm was a Tuberculosis Test for TB which had been allocated as normal to the Herd Keeper's Private Veterinary Practitioner. As there were no other tasks or tests due, there was no other reason for DARD staff to visit.

Lindsay Hall Facility at Loughry College

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the plans for education provision at the Lindsay Hall facility, Loughry College. (AQW 6851/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A review of CAFRE's Loughry Campus in 2006 recommended the consolidation of facilities

within the Loughry site to reduce operational costs. This was confirmed by an economic appraisal with the preferred option being for CAFRE to withdraw from Lindsay Hall and to consolidate teaching and learning facilities in the Food Technology Centre (FTC) and student accommodation within the existing Shannon Hall.

Capital works have been completed to relocate the library and teaching facilities to the FTC, and work to refurbish Shannon Hall is currently underway.

As the College will not require Lindsay Hall after the current academic year it will be available for other purposes. Already it is used as the Headquarters for DARD's Countryside Management Branch and by DARD's Veterinary Service as the Local Epizootic Disease Control Centre for the North. The training rooms within the building are also used by both internal and external groups for training course delivery.

I am also using the facility on a part-time basis as my Private Office.

No decisions have been taken regarding other future uses for the building.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services her department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6863/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has awarded a total of 36 contracts for consultancy services during the period 2004-08 which did not have to go out to public tender, the yearly breakdown of which is as follows:-

Year	Total Number of Consultancy Contracts (Not awarded by Public tender)
04/05	20
05/06	6
06/07	4
07/08	6

Please see attached tables (Appendices 1 – 4), which detail who each contract was awarded to, together with description of contract and value.

DARD CONSULTANCY CONTRACTS (NOT AWARDED BY MEANS OF TENDER) – 2004/05

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
Export Development Programme	Mentoring & training for small businesses to develop capacity for developing export business.	Brilliant Red Consulting	£6,467.87
Max E-Commerce Programme (Self Implementation Programme)	Developing the capacity of companies to use e-commerce.	Carrickfergus Consultants	£39,992
Publicity	Campaign for Leader+ Programme in the Londonderry area.	Issue Ireland	£3,703.75
Economic Appraisal Preparation	Carrying out appraisals for a number of projects to speed up the application process.	MTR Consulting	£2,450
Business Analysis	Provision of advice and support to businesses requiring assistance, identifying needs and sign posting for grants.	Northwest Marketing	£59,192.30
Rural Women Support	Specialist training and support for rural businesses owned by women.	Northwest Marketing	£25,940
Economic Appraisal – Fermanagh Trust	Carrying out economic appraisals for several projects for the Rural Development Council.	Peter Quinn Consultancy Services	£2,550
Micro Business Development Programme (Self Implementation)	Providing specialist training and advice to micro businesses.	Price-waterhouse Coopers	£18,199.15
ICT Contract	ICT training and mentoring to identify needs to businesses leading to capital grants for ICT equipment.	Western Connect	£25,298

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
Review of DARD support arrangements for the seed and ware potato sector.	To undertake an assessment of the value and relevance of the support mechanisms, incl. the internal dept. arrangements for those supports.	Peter Quinn	£16,850
Analysis of Public Policy Intervention (PT II)	To provide specialist advice on public policy intervention for the Food Strategy Group.	Prospectus International Ltd.	£10,000
Aphis Online	Enhancement to extend life of an e-permit to 7 days.	AMT – SYBEX	£1,725
Aphis Online	Disease test notification and post mortem information	AMT – SYBEX	£4,727
Aphis Online	Develop and deliver a training database.	AMT – SYBEX	£8,335
Aphis Online	To put 'number of animals' information in herdlist header.	AMT – SYBEX	£885
Aphis Online	To sort herdlist by date of birth if required.	AMT – SYBEX	£885
Roll out of Britannia Asset Register	Provision of 'Read Only' access to the Fixed Assets Register for selected operational areas.	Real Asset Management PLC	£1,800
Nitrates Directive	Economic Appraisal.	BDO Hayward	£36,763
AFBI Options Exercise	To identify possible financial systems options for AFBI.	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	£4,500
Practice Procedures - LMC	Advice on developing procedures.	Wilson Gillespie & Co.	£9,730

APPENDIX 2

DARD CONSULTANCY CONTRACTS
(NOT AWARDED BY MEANS OF TENDER) – 2005/06

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
Integrated Impact Assessment For Rivers Agency	To conduct an integrated impact appraisal of policy proposals for charging developers for provision of drainage infrastructure prior to a public consultation on the charging proposals.	Deloitte MCS Ltd	£9,562
Transfer of functions from CPG to Vet. Service	Facilitation of workshop.	Core Context Consulting	£3,600
Business Planning	Balanced Scorecard facilitation	Larry Sheeran	£500
Updating Britannia with new database on system	Consultancy in support of the amendment of the Training Database into a live environment for use in respect of tangible IT assets.	Real Asset Management PLC	£950
AFBI Financial System Implementation	Reconfiguration of DAISY financial system to provide AFBI with an accounting and transaction processing service provided by DARD.	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	£31,500
AFBI Options Exercise	Further work in relation to financial systems options and a clear recommendation for the future provision of a financial system.	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	£2,700

APPENDIX 3

DARD CONSULTANCY CONTRACTS
(NOT AWARDED BY MEANS OF TENDER) – 2006/07

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
DARD Information Strategy	To develop an Information Strategy for the Department.	Gartner	£15,000
Expert Advice Re – EU Protected Food Names Scheme	Provision of advice leading to applications for Protected Food Names Scheme. Increased knowledge of scheme for DARD staff members.	Michael Lough – Rural Innovation	£1,157.78
N.I. review of National Fallen Stock Scheme	Independent review a requirement from DFP when they approved the Economic Appraisal to justify DARD's contribution to the scheme	Bob Bansback	£6,000
Review of Hormone Sampling Chain	To secure assurance that DARD procedures in relation to anomalous findings of nortestosterone in cattle are satisfactory	Dr Patrick Wall	£11,000

APPENDIX 4

DARD CONSULTANCY CONTRACTS
(NOT AWARDED BY MEANS OF TENDER) – 2007/08

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
Badger Post Mortem Protocol	(as per subject of consultancy)	Dr Leigh Corner	£731.03
Suitability of Working Conditions	Assessment of report	Heather Ng	£412.00
Study of tasks carried out by Meat Inspectors – (currently ongoing and not yet paid)	Ergonomic Assessment	Dr Sam Murphy	£1,000

Subject of Consultancy	Description	Name of Consultant	Value
Organic Education Materials	Adaptation to NI curriculum	Soil Association	£18,000
Master planning exercise/ business case	For the development of the site of a former military base at Forkhill.	RPS Planning and Environment	£38,800
Integration solution to link two IT systems at CAFRE. (Virtual Environment system and Student Information Management system)	Integration is necessary to maintain an accurate database of student information at all times.	Blackboard Company	£21,400

New Tax on Conacre Land

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the impact of the new tax on conacre land on farming families./R/ (AQW 6943/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As you will be aware, this issue arises from a ruling on Inheritance Tax liability by the Special Commissioners and relates to a specific case where a farm with significant development potential was let entirely in conacre for a number of years by the widow of a retired farmer. Therefore, it appears at this stage to be an issue for farms let in conacre rather than active farm businesses. Moreover, it appears to relate only to conacre land with development potential rather than all conacre land. Consequently, the potential impact would seem to apply only in very specific circumstances.

It is possible that this ruling may be appealed and it is currently being studied by accountants, lawyers and the tax authorities as to its potential wider implications. When this process is completed, I will consider carefully the possible impact on the agricultural industry, including whether I should make representations for possible legislative change.

Naturally, I would be extremely concerned at any decision which might threaten the viability of active family farm businesses which characterise our agricultural industry and lie at the heart of rural communities.

Bluetongue

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place to provide bluetongue vaccinations in the event of a serious outbreak. [R] (AQW 6944/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As you have since been made aware, I have announced that I intend to ensure that almost two million doses of vaccine are available for use should there be an outbreak of bluetongue here.

Under EU legislation, vaccination against bluetongue is not allowed except in a Bluetongue Protection Zone (PZ). We do not have the disease and are not in a PZ. Pre-emptive vaccination is therefore not an option.

However, I consider that it is now prudent to order vaccine as part of our contingency planning so that a supply is available in the event of an outbreak. DARD has therefore bid for funding for vaccine in the June monitoring round.

Officials are now considering the best approach to ordering vaccine taking into account the various issues, including timing of supply and the shelf life of the vaccine. They are also considering the issues around efficient distribution and administration of vaccine; and the audit of the vaccine programme.

Organic Food Production

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what support is available for farmers who wish to switch to organic food production. (AQW 6945/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 I will offer a new Organic Farming Scheme to assist farmers who wish to convert from conventional to organic production.

The new Scheme will provide increased levels of support for the organic livestock sector, with additional support for organic cereal and horticulture production. DARD will pay the following amounts to farmers to cover the first five years of conversion to organic production:

Horticulture (including top fruit)	£670
Arable	£570
Other Improved Land	£470

These payments are on a 'per hectare' basis, and will be apportioned over the five years.

I will also offer an ongoing post-conversion payment of £30 per hectare per year for certified organic land under the Organic Option in the new Countryside Management Scheme.

Supply Chain Development advisers provide advice and skills development to individual producers and groups of producers on market led activities, and CAFRE (Greenmount Campus) continues to provide education, advice and ongoing support in relation to organic farming. It also develops and tests new technologies appropriate to the local organic sector.

In addition a number of Schemes are open, or planned to open, to assist conventional or organic producers under NIRDP 2007-13. In December 2007 I launched the Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme providing up to 40% financial assistance towards capital costs for producers and processors involved or wishing to become involved in processing and marketing. In addition, the Agricultural and Forestry Marketing and Development Grant Scheme and the Supply Chain Development Programme, both due to be launched in 2008, will provide financial assistance to farmers and processors to enhance their marketing capability.

DARD has also offered funding under the Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme towards the set up of an organic guide and web facility for producers and consumers.

In addition, DARD, through funding for the Organic Action Plan Group, sponsored organic study visits for local producers to England in August 2006 and March 2008, and to the South in October 2007. DARD also funded items including a consumer information leaflet, educational material for schools, an organic market study and an Organic Supply Chain Conference.

Tesco Meat Range and Prices

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what correspondence she has had with Tesco supermarket chain, following the publication of their annual account figures showing a £2.8 billion profit, with a view to (i) encouraging them to create a scheme, similar to the Finest range of Aberdeen Angus, with a focus on pig products; and (ii) encouraging Tesco to increase prices paid to producers of pig products for their meat. (AQW 6950/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have engaged with Tesco on a number of occasions since taking office. I met representatives in London last June and visited a local store in connection with the Aberdeen Angus Quality Breed (AAQB) scheme you mention. At the beginning of September 2007 I contacted every supermarket in the

North, including Tesco, expressing my concern about returns at producer level given the rising cost of feed prices and am aware that there has been a subsequent rise in some retail prices. In October I also had the opportunity to put the case for improved producer returns to the Tesco CEO at the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association dinner. As part of my continuing programme of endorsing local produce and promoting increased prices to producers, I will shortly be meeting other supermarket representatives. You will, of course, be aware that price determination is a matter between the parties concerned and cannot be dictated by Government.

Concerning the AAQB scheme, this has two important aspects. Firstly a supply chain relationship has been developed between the producer group, the processor and the retailer. Secondly, Aberdeen Angus beef is a differentiated meat product which was already known in the market place and had consumer values attached to it, making it easier for the group to develop and build on that success. There was also a nucleus of suitable cattle available. The AAQB group has continued to work on this initiative and maintains a high level of drive and enthusiasm which contributes to its success.

My officials and I are very willing to facilitate and support the development of any group of producers who wish to explore a marketing initiative for pigmeat products similar to that of the AAQB scheme. This could be in higher value or niche pigmeat products such as organic, free range, outdoor or traditional breed and for which a dedicated supply base would be required. Alternatively, it could be through different processing techniques where there are consumer tastes or values so that the product can be easily differentiated. I will be pleased to hear what suggestions the pig sector can bring forward.

Tuberculosis Outbreaks

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many outbreaks of tuberculosis there have been in each of the last three years. (AQW 7008/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following are the number of herds in each calendar year that had at least one TB reactor during that year.

2005	2436
2006	1998
2007	1633

Single Farm Payment Applications

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the current level of interest charged by her Department on payments or refunds from livestock owners and land owners as a result of errors, including departmental errors, made in Single Farm Payment applications or other schemes administered by her Department. (AQW 7023/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Interest charged on recovery of undue subsidy and grant payments is at the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) rate plus 1%. The overall rate (LIBOR plus 1%) is presently 6.8275%.

Interest Paid to Livestock Owners

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of interest paid by her Department on money due to livestock owners and land owners, as a result of delays in her Department's offices. (AQW 7024/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Interest may be paid by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in individual cases where premium due under the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) is paid after the deadline specified in European Council Regulation and the delay is due to the Department and not to the circumstances of the case. Where award of interest is appropriate because of such delayed payment, the rate used to calculate interest is the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) + 1%. The rate currently used is 6.8275%.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Arts Council Funding

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the expenditure on publicly funded arts and culture in each of the last three years, broken down by council area. (AQW 6634/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots):

Arts

Funding in support of the arts in Northern Ireland is disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Exchequer funding awarded by the Arts Council in each of the last 3 years broken down by council area is shown in the table below:

Council Area	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Antrim	19,990	130,182	
Ards	42,406	13,190	20,182
Armagh	193,775	137,805	106,100
Ballymena	9,943	5,800	1,700
Banbridge	6,550	3,020	21,040
Belfast	21,440,851	6,578,963	10,073,756
Carrickfergus	7,218	1,700	2,000
Coleraine	94,640	94,050	164,370
Cookstown	15,000		28,000
Craigavon	41,188	84,676	108,100
Derry	4,394,100	1,637,358	1,559,211
Down	72,610	67,335	69,355
Dungannon	91,414	11,681	6,200
Fermanagh	5,880	15,000	53,055
Larne	20,300	300	250
Limavady	20,157.35		681
Lisburn	316,739	256,740	254,362
Magherafelt	10,000	5,300	
Moyle	5,500	24,180	
Newry and Mourne	50,900	131,170	95,923
Newtownabbey	37,340	7,080	10,299
North Down	163,201	45,200	121,896
Omagh	2,500		5,570
Strabane			6,477
Other	253,450	179,200	177,000*

* Grants awarded to organisations which are not specific to 1 particular council area or grants awarded to organisations/individual artists outside Northern Ireland.

Museums

Funding in support of Museums is disbursed through the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC), National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) and W5. Funding awarded by these bodies is broken down by council area in the tables below:

NIMC

Council Area	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Ards	111, 215		16, 395
Armagh		900	6, 820
Ballymena	14, 059	3, 450	13, 752
Ballymoney	9, 509		2, 312

Council Area	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Belfast	15, 717		12, 713
Carrickfergus	13, 674	6, 155	9, 625
Coleraine	28, 823	35, 107	20, 404
Craigavon		438	
Derry	8, 240	448	14, 260
Down	11, 061	1, 500	9, 105
Dungannon			
Fermanagh	17, 212	1, 750	19, 325
Larne	20, 988	1, 838	2, 538
Limavady	8, 228		1, 250
Lisburn	13, 417	9, 987	11, 288
Moyle	4, 667		2, 966
Newtownabbey	4, 738	1, 500	1, 500
North Down	6, 500		
Strabane	6, 646	6, 646	17, 088

NMNI

Council Area	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Armagh	186, 000	188, 000	229, 000
Belfast	3, 512, 000	4, 102, 000	5, 111, 000
North Down	7, 228,000	6, 863,000	6, 776,000
Omagh	1, 955,000	2, 012,000	2, 016,000

W5

Council Area	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Belfast	1,197,737	1,150,000	450,000

CLDPB

With the exception of funding to the Gaeltacht Quarter: £9,400 for 2005/06; £7,800 for 2006/07; £89,954 for 2007/08; which is specifically targeted at West Belfast, other funding for cultural and linguistic diversity is not available by council area.

Libraries

DCAL funds the five Education and Library Boards for the delivery of the public library service. The funding allocated for the last three years was provided in AQO2854/08.

DCAL also allocated funding the Linen Hall Library, Belfast and the Cardinal O’Fiaich Library and Archive, Armagh as per the table below:

	2007/08 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2005/06 (£)
Linen Hall Library (Belfast) – recurrent grant	290,000	285,000	313,000
Linen Hall Library (Belfast) – capital grant	27,000	15,000	
Cardinal O’Fiaich Library & Archive (Armagh) – recurrent grant	26,000	26,000	26,000

EU Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the EU funding surrendered by his Department in each of the last 2 financial years. (AQW 6672/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure administered the EU Peace II Programme, Measure 1.2a, which related to water based tourism projects. A total of 62 projects were successful in receiving EU funding of 4.8 million pounds. The projects were all water recreation and angling related projects across N. Ireland. The last two financial years (2006-2008) IWIF Branch has allocated £1,872,817.00 to 37 projects. No EU funding was surrendered in the last two years.

Departmental Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which his Department’s (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, are carried out electronically. (AQW 6751/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not currently have any mechanisms in place to electronically monitor the amount of internal and external correspondence or publications distributed by staff. However, all staff are aware of the DCAL Waste Management Action Plan and, in line with this, printing should not be carried out unless it is completely necessary and no other alternative is available.

Private Finance Initiative Library

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the usage figures in relation to

the new Private Finance Initiative library in Lisburn; (ii) how these figures compare with past provision of libraries in the Lisburn area; and to give his assessment of the benefits in replicating this in other areas. (AQW 6779/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

- (i) The usage figures in relation to the new Private Finance Initiative library in Lisburn are shown in the table below.

Year	Issues	Active Borrowers	Visitors
2007/08	219,779	12,542	249,236
2006/07	243,099	11,745	277,628

Note: 2006/07 was the first full year of operation

- (ii) The new Lisburn Library which opened on 30 November 2005 replaced two libraries in Lisburn, Railway Street and Laurelhill. In their last full year of operation the usage figures of these libraries were shown in the table below.

Library	Year	Issues	Active Borrowers/ Users	Visitors
Railway St	2004/05	111,231	5,031	85,384
Laurelhill	2004/05	45,634	1,895	23,348
Total		156,865	6,926	108,732

Note: The Library at Poleglass closed on 25 January 2005.

- (iii) I am convinced that providing modern, state of the art library facilities across Northern Ireland is an important investment in our future; culturally, economically and socially. Lisburn Library is a great success and I am keen that we continue the programme of modernisation across Northern Ireland; replicating best practice and tailoring services to local need.

I have secured £31.6m in the next three years and £107m for the following 7 years for investment in the modernisation of public libraries.

2012 Olympic Games

Mr O’Dowd asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the mechanisms his Department has put in place to ensure maximum (i) sporting; (ii) cultural; and (iii) financial, benefit is achieved from the Elite Facilities Programme for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. (AQW 6786/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The aim of the Elite Facilities Capital Programme is to address Northern Ireland’s sporting infrastructure

deficit as identified by Sport Northern Ireland on behalf of my Department.

The proposed facilities will help to ensure that Northern Ireland can host major sporting events. Such events increase tourism and project a positive image of Northern Ireland to a broad international audience and contribute to the economy.

One of my Department's PSA targets is "to attract 10 or more sports from other countries, to Northern Ireland in 2012 for Pre Games Training Camps (PGTCs)". This objective has been included within the existing 2012 Strategy. There will be opportunities to use the proposed Elite Facilities to host other countries/nations for pre-games training camps and to promote aspects of Northern Ireland's culture through specific events organised at the pre-games training camp venues and/or as part of a wider programme for visiting athletes and their support personnel.

On the 3rd March 2008 I announced that 27 sporting venues in Northern Ireland will appear in the pre-Games Training Camp Guide for the London 2012 Games. A further announcement will be made soon about which facilities in Northern Ireland will be included in the Pre Games Training Camp Guide for the Paralympic Games in 2012.

The 2012 Guide for pre-games training camps will be launched at the Beijing Games in the Summer of 2008.

Horse Sport Ireland

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to confirm if his Department recognises 'Horse Sport Ireland' as a governing sporting body in relation to the application process for the Elite Facilities Scheme. (AQW 6787/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Horse Sport Ireland became the recognised governing body for Equestrian Sport in Ireland in January 2008 and since then Sport Northern Ireland have had discussions with them about the development of High Performance Plans, Budgets and Key Performance Indicators in the context of the Elite Facilities Programme

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services his department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6864/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure awarded the following consultancy contracts which did not have to go out to public tender in each of the years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08:

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Roger Ulrich	Guest Speaker at Interdepartmental Steering Group	1,362
Central Procurement Directorate	Cashel Trout Farm Project	As required – need based drawdown contract with CPD
Dept of Finance & Personnel	EU Verification – Article 4 & 10 checks on EU Projects	As required – need based drawdown contract with DFP
Hugh Boyd Antiques	Valuation of prints and accommodation	750
Sam Butler Editorial	Production of PRONI Archive Policy	500

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Richard Buchanan Consulting	Executive Team Meeting	280
Charis Consulting Services	Child Protection Workshop	408
Central Procurement Directorate	Project Advisor for Capital Projects	As required – need based drawdown contract with CPD
Jane Preston/ATEC	Flora and Fauna Survey on Upper Lough Macnean	1000
Dr CJ Kitching	Archival Expert Advisor on PRONI New Accommodation Project	10,000

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Central Procurement Directorate	Service Level Agreement between CPD and DCAL	69,000
Celine McKenna	Big Lottery Fund Independent Advisor	1,144
Adventure Activities Associates	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	20,000
Countryside Recreation NI	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	203

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Judith A Annett	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	200
BDO Stoy Hayward	Rally Ireland/Ni Events Company Arbitration	10,000
Departmental Solicitors Office	Provision of Title Deeds for land under covenant and charge	As required – need based drawdown contract
Rally Ireland Management Ltd	Business Case for 2007 World Rally Championship	30,000
Central Procurement Directorate	Procurement relating to Multi Sports Stadium Project	13,520
Imelda McAuley	Irish Language Legislation	28,350
Prof Gorter	Advice on Ulster Scots Academy Proposals	1,229
European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages	Review of Ulster Scots Academy Business Plan	817
Dr Roger Dixon	Archiving in Resource Centre	150
Terrier Services	PRONI Security Review	1,200

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
CILIP	Interview Panel for Recruitment of Chief Executive (Designate) of NI Library Authority	530
Bernard McCloskey QC	Legal Advice to Minister iro membership of NI Library Authority	850
Julia Bracewell	OCPANI Assessor – Sport NI Board appointments	274
Joan Ruddock	OCPANI Assessor – Sport NI Chair/ Vice-Chair appointments	2,927
Orla Moore	OCPANI Assessor – NI Events Company board appointments	437
Central Procurement Directorate	Professional Fees 2007-08	As required – need based drawdown contract with CPD

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
John Caldwell	Consultancy assignment for NI Events Company	245,000 (joint contract with KPMG)
KPMG	NI Events Company “What Happened” review and forensic audit	245,000 (joint contract with John Caldwell)
CIPFA	Review of Governance in DCAL Arms Length Bodies	50,000
Department of Education	Internal Audit	67,227
David Gibson	Corporate Governance of Ulster Scots Agency	4,060
Mazars	Follow up review – Foras na Gaeilge	2,133
Donal O’Riagain	Review of Ulster Scots Road Map	5,000

Rebuilt Library in Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the rebuilt library in Bangor will be opened. (AQW 6869/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The extensively refurbished and extended Bangor Library is scheduled to open to the public in October 2008.

Arts Council Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding the Arts Council has provided to the Ulster Scots orchestra in each of the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. (AQW 6870/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra received Lottery funding from the Arts Council as follows:

2005/06	£12,556
2006/07	£16,179
2007/08	£38

The period of the award ran from June 2003 to October 2007.

Arts Council Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if the reduction in funding to the Ulster Scots orchestra from the Arts Council has been in proportion to reductions in other funding sectors within the Arts Council's remit. (AQW 6871/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Arts Council makes funding decisions on the basis of individual applications scored against published criteria. Applications are not determined by sector. The Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra's 2007 application was turned down by the Arts Council as it did not meet their funding criteria.

New Library in Newtownards

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an update the provision of a new library building in Newtownards; and to indicate when work will commence on the project. (AQW 7035/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The South Eastern Education and Library Board is responsible for developing an Economic Appraisal to support the case for a new Library facility to serve the Newtownards area.

The need to improve and modernise Library facilities in Newtownards is clear. However, the Board must submit a fully developed Appraisal which identifies a suitable alternative proposal. A number of fundamental issues remain outstanding before a significant investment can be approved.

I am keen to see progress with this project and Departmental officials will ask the Board to consider how it might expedite the process.

Funding for School Sports Finals

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding has been provided towards schools finals in (i) football; (ii) hockey; (iii) Gaelic sports; and (iv) rugby, over the last five years. (AQW 7175/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI has not provided funding towards schools finals in football, hockey, Gaelic sport or rugby over the last five financial years.

Maze Stadium

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what date the accounting officer will sign off the Department's outline business case for the Maze Stadium project. (AQW 7184/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure Accounting Officer provided an assessment on the Outline Business Case on the Multi Sports Stadium project to the Department of Finance and Personnel on 14th May 2008. It is the Minister's intention to release the Accounting Officer's assessment to the CAL Committee at a future meeting.

Ulster Canal

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline his contact with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the regeneration of the Ulster Canal. (AQO 3538/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In October 2007, following an North South Ministerial Council Plenary in July at which the two governments had agreed to proceed with the restoration of the Clones to Upper Lough Erne stretch of the Ulster Canal, Minister O Cuiv, Minister of Community Gaeltacht, and Rural Affairs and I agreed a framework for Waterways Ireland to take forward the restoration

Castle Gardens Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the timescale for the demolition of Castle Gardens School, Newtownards, in order to build a new library at this site; and what concerns he has at the health and safety risks that currently exist at this site, and its use as a place for antisocial behaviour. (AQO 3518/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The site of the former Castle Gardens Primary School is being considered as the possible location for a new Library in Newtownards.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has erected fencing around the perimeter to secure the property while an Economic Appraisal is being developed.

The Board is reviewing the condition of the fencing and has been informed that they may put a case to the Department for additional funding to secure the site if considered necessary.

Work specifically related to the development of any new library cannot commence until the Economic Appraisal has been approved.

Modern Football Facilities

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will initiate talks with representatives of football interests in order to provide modern football facilities that are capable of hosting international matches. (AQO 3500/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of the need for modern football facilities that are capable of hosting international matches and it is intended that this will be addressed by the proposals for a Multi-Sports Stadium which has the full support of the governing body for football here, the Irish Football Association. The proposals also have the full support of the governing bodies for Rugby and Gaelic Games.

The Girona Collection

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider the transfer of the Girona exhibition, formerly displayed in the Ulster Museum which is currently closed for refurbishment, to the new Giant's Causeway Visitors' Centre. (AQO 3503/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Girona collection is one of the most important held by the Ulster Museum and has been a centrepiece of its displays for many years. The collection will feature prominently as a permanent display in the refurbished Ulster Museum, scheduled to open in the summer of 2009.

National Museums Northern Ireland runs an active loans programme and will consider requests for loans on an individual basis.

Community Festival Funding

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of councils that have taken up offers for community festival funding. (AQO 3522/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To date 22 councils have responded to accept the offers for community festivals funding. A further 3 councils (Craigavon, Derry and Ballymoney) have indicated that they intend to accept their offers. Belfast City Council has yet to respond to the offer.

Irish Language and Ulster-Scots

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what resources he has available to implement the indigenous languages strategy; and to

confirm the breakdown of funding available to the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots. (AQO 3498/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The cross-departmental Indigenous Languages strategy will be underpinned by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It is anticipated that resources allocated to implementing this Charter will also support the Strategy.

For a breakdown of funding for Irish and Ulster-Scots I would refer the member to AQO 1661/08 which was answered on 8 February 2008.

Irish Language Groups

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of Irish Language groups which he has consulted about a strategy to promote and enhance the Irish Language; and to detail the next steps and timeline for devising this strategy. (AQO 3540/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have met with Foras na Gaeilge, Ulster-Scots Agency and have spoken at a Pobal conference on the 7th March 2008 on "Developing a comprehensive policy and a strategy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language in the North of Ireland."

My officials have met with Foras na Gaeilge, Pobal, the Ulster-Scots Agency, the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group Partnership Board and the Ulster-Scots Language Society.

Foras na Gaeilge, Pobal and the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group Partnership Board have delivered presentations on the way forward for indigenous languages to the Interdepartmental Group responsible for developing an Indigenous Languages Strategy.

I intend to bring a paper detailing proposals, including arrangements for consultation, for a Strategy on indigenous languages to the Executive later this year.

Departmental Information in Braille

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what provisions are in place by his Department to ensure that documents are made available to the visually impaired. (AQO 3537/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL has put in place a number of measures to ensure that Departmental information is readily accessible to all, including the visually impaired.

The Department has strived to ensure that information which may be sought by the public is available in various formats including Braille and large print. The DCAL

website has a “browse aloud” facility which can be accessed by the visually impaired for their benefit.

In addition, DCAL public bodies have implemented a number of projects and initiatives to enable ease of use and access to services. These include Braille signage at the Armagh Planetarium, the Library Service Spoken Word programme and magnification aids and large print keyboards being made available in the Public Record Office.

Pigeon Racing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support his Department gives to pigeon racing. (AQW 7287/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI has advised that pigeon racing is not recognised as a sport by the Sports Councils throughout the UK. As such it does not currently qualify for support from SNI.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Leanfar ar aghaidh le clár na Scoileanna Sínte a mhaoiniú le linn thréimhse Bhuiséad 2007.

The Extended Schools programme will continue to be funded over the Budget 2007 period. The increase in the overall education budget however does not allow for funding at the levels provided under the Children's and Young People funding Package. I have been able to increase the resources from what was originally made available by finding efficiencies elsewhere but further resources are required and I have expressed my concerns to the Finance Minister.

The Renewing Communities programme was a range of pilot projects aimed at selected disadvantaged areas of Belfast. These are not being funded separately after 31 March 2008 although run out costs will be provided for a number of strands up to 30 June 2008 and others will be mainstreamed. The BELB is drawing up plans for a targeted initiative in Belfast and I would expect they will wish to consider these pilots and their appropriateness to their plans.

Teachers

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the average age of teachers in (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools, broken down by sector, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 5152/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

EDUCATION

Extended Schools Programme

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education to confirm whether or not she will continue funding for the (i) extended schools programme; and (ii) renewing communities programme, which are due to end this year. (AQW 4215/08)

AVERAGE AGE OF TEACHERS BY SCHOOL TYPE AND MANAGEMENT TYPE

		2007 ¹	2006 ¹	2005 ¹	2004 ¹	2003 ¹	2002 ¹	2001 ¹	2000 ¹	1999 ¹	1998 ¹
Primary	Controlled	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	40	41	40
	Catholic Maintained	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	40
	Other Maintained	35	35	34	34	34	34	35	36	36	35
	Controlled Integrated	38	38	39	39	39	38	38	37	37	38
	Grant Maintained Integrated	37	38	37	37	37	36	36	36	36	35
	Total Average Primary	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	40	40
Post-Primary ²	Controlled	41	41	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
	Catholic Maintained	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	42	42	41
	Other Maintained	34	37	38	39	38	38	38	39	39	39
	Controlled Integrated	41	40	40	40	41	40	40	40	40	40
	Grant Maintained Integrated	37	37	37	37	36	36	35	35	35	35
	Total Average Post Primary	40	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41

		2007 ¹	2006 ¹	2005 ¹	2004 ¹	2003 ¹	2002 ¹	2001 ¹	2000 ¹	1999 ¹	1998 ¹
Total	Controlled	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
	Catholic Maintained	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
	Other Maintained	35	36	35	35	35	35	36	37	36	36
	Controlled Integrated	39	39	40	40	40	39	39	39	39	39
	Grant Maintained Integrated	37	37	37	37	37	36	36	35	35	35
	Overall Total	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41

Commissioners of the South Eastern and Education Library Board

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of occasions she has met formally with the Commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 5184/08)

The Minister of Education: Is féidir liom a dheimhniú gur bhuail mé uair amháin go dtí seo, go foirmiúil, leis an Uasal Douglas Osler, Cathaoirleach na gCoimisinéirí de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt.

I can confirm that to date I have met once, formally, with Mr Douglas Osler, the Chair of the Commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

I have also met him during a visit to Tor Bank Special School, in Dundonald.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which currently use mobile classrooms that have been in constant use for over 30 years; and to provide a timescale within which these

temporary classrooms will be replaced with modern accommodation. /R/ (AQW 5520/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn eolas ar aois chóiríochta sealadaí.

The Department does not hold information on the age of temporary accommodation. The replacement of temporary accommodation is considered on the basis of an assessment of the condition and suitability of the accommodation at each school.

Primary and Post-Primary School Figures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of long term unfilled places in (i) each primary school; and (ii) each post-primary school in the South Tyrone area. (AQW 5746/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá eolas maidir le barrachas measta toillte i mbunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna i limistéar Dheisceart Thír Eoghain leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

Information on estimated surplus capacity in primary schools and post-primary schools in the South Tyrone area is set out in the table below.

School Name	Capacity	Enrolment 2003	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2004	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2005	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2006	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2007	Surplus Places
Post-Primary											
Aughnacloy High School	200	145	-55	164	-36	177	-23	187	-13	197	-3
Drumglass High School	600	428	-172	415	-185	409	-191	401	-199	369	-231
Fivemiletown High & Comm College	550	410	-140	389	-161	387	-163	371	-179	371	-179
Integrated College, Dungannon	500	500	0	500	0	469	-31	460	-40	438	-62
St Joseph's Convent Gram Sch	500	498	-2	495	-5	496	-4	501	0	514	0
St Joseph's High School	680	593	-87	573	-107	504	-176	454	-226	454	-226
St. Patrick's College, Dungannon	700	596	-104	553	-147	556	-144	527	-173	547	-153
St Patrick's Academy	1,580	1,685	0	1,611	0	1,565	-15	1,543	-37	1,499	-81
The Royal School, Dungannon	650	650	0	654	0	619	-31	646	-4	651	0
Total:	5,960	5,505	-560	5,354	-641	5,182	-778	5,090	-871	5,040	-935

School Name	Capacity	Enrolment 2003	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2004	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2005	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2006	Surplus Places	Enrolment 2007	Surplus Places
Primary											
Clintyclay PS	47	35	-12	34	-13	30	-17	34	-13	31	-16
Clogher Regional PS	56	28	-28	25	-31	30	-26	24	-32	20	-36
Derrylatinee PS	106	91	-15	85	-21	86	-20	89	-17	95	-11
Donaghmore PS	56	50	-6	46	-10	44	-12	54	-2	52	-4
Dungannon PS	231	186	-45	196	-35	211	-20	257	0	243	0
Eglis PS*	52	24	-28	20	-32	16	-36	11	-41	Closed	
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	116	87	-29	98	-18	103	-13	104	-12	113	-3
Howard PS	291	238	-53	225	-66	217	-74	201	-90	208	-83
Laghey PS	56	37	-19	44	-12	40	-16	42	-14	49	-7
Lisferty PS	74	45	-29	52	-22	47	-27	54	-20	45	-29
Minterburn PS**	56	28	-28	36	-20	28	-28	24	-32	11	-45
Moy Regional PS	86	50	-36	48	-38	42	-44	36	-50	34	-52
Orchard PS	145	***			0	85	-60	88	-57	93	-52
Richmond	145	***			0	87	-58	92	-53	96	-49
Roan PS	112	45	-67	69	-43	71	-41	74	-38	80	-32
St Brigid's	114	114	0	114	0	114	0	44	-70	69	-45
St Joseph's PS	56	40	-16	36	-20	36	-20	34	-22	34	-22
St Mary's PS	56	38	-18	33	-23	35	-21	36	-20	36	-20
St Patrick's PS	231	239	0	239	0	224	-7	218	-13	218	-13
St Patrick's PS Dungannon	713	536	-177	536	-177	559	-154	601	-112	622	-91
Walker Memorial PS	86	86	0	86	0	71	-15	68	-18	69	-17
Total:	2,885	1,997	-606	2,022	-581	2,176	-709	2,185	-726	2,218	-627

*** school opened in 2005.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the meetings she intends to hold before making a decision on the recommendation for the closure of Donaghadee High School. (AQW 5825/08)

The Minister of Education: There is currently a development proposal for Donaghadee High School to acquire controlled integrated status. I understand also that the SEELB intends to publish shortly a proposal for closure which would initiate a two-month consultation process during which any comments on it may be made to the department.

Go dtí seo fuair mé iarratas amháin ar chruinniú leis an dúnadh féideartha a phlé agus thoiligh mé leis.

I have to date received and agreed to one request for a meeting to discuss the potential closure.

Balmoral High School

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail the findings and recommendations that arose from the Post Project Evaluation report into the Balmoral High School PFI/PPP Project. (AQW 5826/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an Roinn ag gabháil tuilleadh oibre ar mheasúnú an tionscadail seo de láimh agus cuirfidh mé an t-eolas ar fáil duit a luaithe a bheas sé fá réir.

The department is undertaking further work on the evaluation of this project and I will provide the information to you as soon as it is available.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5007/08, to detail (i) how the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism is funded and (ii) the company that funds it; and to confirm (a) if her department provides funding to this company; and (b) if the company is accountable to her department. (AQW 5928/08)

The Minister of Education: The Middletown Centre for Autism is funded on a 50:50 basis by the Department of Education and the Department for Education and Science (DES). An operating company, limited by guarantee, was established by the two Departments in March 2007. The Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd is the body funded equally by both Departments to run the Centre.

The Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd is accountable to both Education Departments. A Memorandum and Articles of Association was drawn up by the two Departments for the Company, this gives the Board of Directors the authority to manage and operate the Centre and also details the 'Reserved Matters' which require specific Departmental approval. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mr James G Cooper has been designated as the Accounting Officer for the Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd. The CEO and the Board of the Centre have also signed separate Funding Agreements with each Department and are in the process of agreeing a rigorous, joint Management Statement and Financial Memorandum for the Centre, this document is currently with the Department of Finance and Personnel for their consideration.

Is é The Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Ltd an dara comhlacht atá cómhaoinithe ag an dá Roinn; bunaíodh é i mBealtaine 2004 leis an mhaoín ag Middletown a cheannach, a choinneáil agus a chothabháil agus faoi láthair léasaíonn siad an suíomh agus na foirgnimh leis an chomhlacht fheidhmiúcháin.

The second company jointly funded by the two Departments is the Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Ltd; it was established in May 2004 to purchase, hold and maintain the property at Middletown and currently leases the site and buildings to the operating company. This company has a small Board of four Directors, two appointed by the Minister of Education in the North and two appointed by the Minister for Education and Science in the South. The company no longer receives money directly from the Departments, but they do meet its annual expenses.

Teaching Jobs

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education for her assessment on how current demographic trends will

impact upon teaching jobs, now and in the future.

(AQW 6039/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl líon na foirne do scoileanna leagtha síos agus de réir na socrúithe do Bhainistíocht Aitiúil Scoileanna, is ceist í do Bhord Gobharnóirí na scoile aonair a riachtanais foirne a chinneadh.

There is no set level of staffing for schools and, under Local Management of Schools arrangements, it is a matter for the individual Board of Governors of a school to determine its staffing needs.

That said, demographics lie at the heart of teacher supply needs which in turn are informed by school pupil census data. However, in determining future needs, there are many other factors which have to be taken into consideration, including:

- the number of newly qualified teachers who cannot secure permanent teaching employment or who register for job seekers allowance;
- the number of vacancies which employers indicate they have filled or intend to fill in the current academic year, on a permanent or temporary basis; and
- the number of teachers registered with the Substitute Teachers' Register as eligible and available to teach.

In addition, there is a need to take into account not only demographics but other factors such as the review of teacher education, my education reform programme and other education policies including: literacy and numeracy provision; the Revised Curriculum; and special needs provision.

I will continue to monitor closely the teacher supply position for future years.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who are currently statemented in Belfast, and the schools these children attend, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6179/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

PUPILS WITH STATEMENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED AT SCHOOLS IN BELFAST, 2007/08

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1310003	Cedar Lodge Special School	Belfast North	135

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1310012	Fleming Fulton Special School	Belfast South	131
1310014	Harberton Special School	Belfast South	142
1310016	Mitchell House Special School	Belfast East	66
1310017	Greenwood House Assessment Centre	Belfast East	20
1316500	Park Educ Resource Centre	Belfast South	102
1316569	Glenveagh Special	Belfast South	199
1316582	Oakwood Special School	Belfast South	69
1316584	Clarawood Special School	Belfast East	8
1336012	St Francis De Sales	Belfast West	13
1336548	St Gerard's Resource Education Centre	Belfast West	176
1210014	Ashfield Girls' High School	Belfast East	12
1210015	Ashfield Boys' High School	Belfast East	26
1210021	Belfast Model School For Girls	Belfast North	7
1210022	Belfast Boys' Model School	Belfast North	24
1210258	Castle High School	Belfast North	5
1210266	Orangefield High School	Belfast East	17
1210288	Balmoral High School	Lagan Valley	*
1230026	St Patrick's College	Belfast North	15
1230032	St Gabriel's Boys School	Belfast North	*
1230053	St Louise's College	Belfast West	20
1230089	Little Flower Girls' School	Belfast North	11
1230104	Our Lady Of Mercy Girls' School	Belfast North	5
1230130	St Rose's High School	Belfast West	12
1230146	Christian Brothers Secondary School	Belfast West	15
1230155	St Genevieve's High School	Belfast West	10
1230173	St Gemma's High School	Belfast North	*

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1230182	La Salle Boys' School	Belfast West	27
1230262	Corpus Christi College	Belfast West	15
1230275	St Joseph's College	Belfast South	39
1240291	Colaiste Feirste	Belfast West	*
1260269	Hazelwood College	Belfast North	40
1260294	Malone Integrated College	Belfast South	36
1410079	Grosvenor Grammar School	Belfast East	12
1410270	Wellington College	Belfast South	6
1420018	Bloomfield Collegiate	Belfast East	*
1420020	Campbell College	Belfast East	*
1420021	St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	Belfast West	5
1420022	Methodist College	Belfast South	7
1420027	The Royal Belfast Academical Inst.	Belfast South	9
1420028	Belfast Royal Academy	Belfast North	*
1420029	St Dominic's High School	Belfast West	5
1420030	St Malachy's College	Belfast North	6
1420082	Dominican College	Belfast North	*
1420089	Strathearn School	Belfast East	*
1420095	Rathmore Grammar School	Belfast South	11
1420264	Victoria College	Belfast South	*
1420265	Hunterhouse College	Belfast South	*
1420277	Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	Belfast South	26
1010063	Currie Primary School	Belfast North	*
1010146	Euston Street Primary School	Belfast East	*
1010157	Rosetta Primary School	Belfast South	*
1010205	Forth River Primary School	Belfast West	*
1010221	Springfield Primary School	Belfast West	*
1010231	Strand Primary School	Belfast East	5

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1010232	Harding Memorial Primary School	Belfast South	*
1010252	Strandtown Primary School	Belfast East	9
1010255	Elmgrove Primary School	Belfast East	6
1010266	Seaview Primary School	Belfast North	*
1010267	Nettlefield Primary School	Belfast South	*
1010269	Avoniel Primary School	Belfast East	*
1010271	Beechfield Primary School	Belfast East	*
1010273	Orangefield Primary School	Belfast East	6
1010282	Carr's Glen Primary School	Belfast North	*
1010296	Ballygolan Primary School	Belfast North	30
1010301	Taughmonagh Primary School	Belfast South	37
1010304	Greenwood Primary School	Belfast East	*
1010307	Springhill Primary School	Belfast West	*
1010321	Vere Foster Primary School	Belfast West	*
1010323	Edenbrooke Primary School	Belfast North	5
1010324	Stranmillis Primary School	Belfast South	*
1010325	Ligoniel Primary School	Belfast North	*
1010831	Cavehill Primary School	Belfast North	5
1010863	Suffolk Primary School	Belfast West	*
1013018	Knocknagoney Primary School	Belfast East	*
1016060	Donegall Road Primary School	Belfast South	*
1016242	Dundela Infants School	Belfast East	*
1016483	Cliftonville Primary School	Belfast North	*
1016485	Glenwood Primary School	Belfast North	*

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1016498	Malvern Primary School	Belfast West	*
1016499	Botanic Primary School	Belfast South	*
1016532	Wheatfield Primary School	Belfast North	10
1016537	Lowwood Primary School	Belfast North	*
1016604	Harmony Primary School	Belfast West	6
1016647	Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	Belfast North	*
1030194	Holy Cross Boys' Primary School	Belfast North	*
1030313	Our Lady Of Lourdes Primary School	Belfast North	5
1030316	St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary School	Belfast West	*
1030326	Our Lady's Girls' Primary School	Belfast North	*
1030327	Holy Rosary Primary School	Belfast South	5
1030329	Edmund Rice (Cb) Primary School	Belfast North	6
1030331	Holy Cross Girls' Primary School	Belfast North	*
1030868	St Anne's Primary School	Belfast South	5
1036041	Mercy Primary School	Belfast North	*
1036042	St Vincent De Paul Primary School	Belfast North	6
1036048	St Mary's Star Of The Sea Primary School	Belfast North	*
1036075	St Bride's Primary School	Belfast South	10
1036092	St John The Baptist Boys' Primary School	Belfast West	*
1036132	St Therese Of Lisieux Primary School	Belfast North	11
1036140	St Michael's Primary School	Belfast South	*
1036246	St Joseph's Primary School	Belfast East	*
1036388	St Mary's Primary School	Belfast West	*

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1036464	Star Of The Sea Girls' Primary School	Belfast North	*
1036466	St Malachy's Primary School	Belfast South	7
1036471	Sacred Heart Primary School	Belfast North	*
1036505	St Matthew's Primary School	Belfast East	*
1036565	St Kevin's Primary School	Belfast West	*
1036566	Holy Family Primary School	Belfast North	5
1036576	Holy Child Primary School	Belfast West	6
1036589	St Teresa's Primary School	Belfast West	8
1036602	St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Belfast West	13
1036620	St Peter's Primary School	Belfast West	*
1036621	St Joseph's Primary School	Belfast West	7
1036623	Holy Trinity Primary School	Belfast West	55
1036624	St Paul's Primary School	Belfast West	*
1036630	St Clare's Primary School	Belfast West	13
1046501	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Belfast West	*
1046571	Gaelscoil Na Bhfal	Belfast West	*
1046593	Bunscoil An Tsleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast West	*
1056535	Forge Integrated Primary School	Belfast South	*
1066531	Hazelwood Primary School	Belfast North	15
1066580	Cranmore Integrated Primary School	Belfast South	*
1620020	Cabin Hill School	Belfast East	*
1620023	Fullerton House Preparatory School	Belfast South	*
1620027	Inchmarlo Prep. Dept.	Belfast South	*
1620028	Ben Madigan Preparatory School	Belfast North	*
1620264	Victoria College Prep. Dept.	Belfast South	*

School ref	School	Constituency	Statemented pupils
1110025	Tudor Lodge Nursery School	Belfast North	*
1116160	Sandbrook Nursery School	Belfast East	*
1130027	Bethlehem Nursery School	Belfast South	*
1136229	St Mary's Nursery School	Belfast North	*
1136314	St Teresa's Nursery School	Belfast West	*
1136316	Holy Child Nursery School	Belfast West	*
1136353	St Maria Goretti Nursery School	Belfast West	*
1AB0025	Wishing Well Family Centre	Belfast North	*
1AB0422	Resurrection Nursery And Playgroup	Belfast North	*
1AB0494	Belmont Pre-School Playgroup	Belfast East	*
	Total		1,951

Source: NI school census.

Note:

- Figures for voluntary and private pre-school centres refer to children in funded places.
- Figures for primary schools refer to children in nursery, reception and Year 1 – 7 classes.

* relates to 1 – 4 pupils.

Disability Employment

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the targets set by her department in relation to the employment of people with disabilities over the next five years. (AQW 6194/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl spriocanna ag an Roinn seo i dtaca le daoine atá míchumasaithe a fhostú.

The NICS does not have targets in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. The Department of Education is however firmly committed to adhering to employment legislation as it relates to the protection of people with a disability and its duties under Section 75.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 2 years, the number of primary school children with special education needs

in the Ards Borough Council area, broken down by electoral ward. (AQW 6212/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

**PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS –
ARDS COUNCIL AREA 2006/07 - 2007/08**

Ward code	Ward Name	2006/07	2007/08
95BB01	Ballygowan	34	33
95BB02	Ballyrainey	0	76
95BB03	Ballywalter	41	49
95BB04	Bradshaws Brae	81	0
95BB05	Carrowdore	21	19
95BB06	Central (Ards)	114	112
95BB07	Comber East	*	*
95BB08	Comber North	63	62
95BB08	Comber West	29	0
95BB10	Donaghadee North	53	72
95BB11	Donaghadee South	21	#
95BB12	Glen	50	51
95BB13	Gregstown	31	42
95BB14	Killinchy	39	41
95BB15	Kircubbin	56	54
95BB16	Lisbane	#	37
95BB17	Loughries	92	86
95BB18	Millisle	42	38
95BB20	Portaferry	81	82
95BB21	Portavogie	37	51
95BB22	Scrabo	41	37
	Total	941	957

Source: NI school census

Note:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and years 1 – 7.
2. Figures relate to location of school attended.

“*” denotes fewer than 5 pupils

“#” denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of pupils.

Education Sector Employees

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5061/08, to give a

timescale within which she expects that all education sector employees included in the 2007 NJC increase of 2.475% (3.4% on spinal column 4) will be in receipt of their pay rise. (AQW 6632/08)

The Minister of Education: Pay remits covering the majority of staff have been agreed and the Education and Library Boards have advised that payment of the new rate and arrears commenced in April 2008.

Tá an Roinn ag dúil go gcomhaontófar na téarmaí tagartha íocaíochta atá fanta le gur féidir íocaíochtaí a thabhairt faoi dheireadh Meithimh.

The Department expects the remaining pay remits to be agreed to enable payments to be made by the end of June.

Dickson Plan for Education

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education to detail the legal rights of schools within the Dickson Plan for Education to set their own academic criteria for transfers from junior high schools. (AQW 6637/08)

The Minister of Education: The legal framework for the present system of academic selection (including that of selective schools within the Dickson Plan) is in the Education Order 1997 and its supporting regulations. By virtue of the Education Order 2006, that legislative framework will lapse with effect from Transfer 2010.

Article 28(1) of the Education Order 2006 gives the Department the power to specify, through regulations, the admissions criteria that schools may use. Article 28(2) of the Education Order precludes the Department from including academic admissions criteria in any future permitted admissions. Article 28(2) has not been commenced.

Tá mé ag iarraidh comhaontú a fháil ar rialacháin do chritéir nua iontrála a shonróidh critéir cheadaithe iontrála do gach iar-bhunscóil, agus iad siúd i bPlean Dixon san áireamh, ó 2010 i leith.

I am seeking to establish agreement for new admissions criteria regulations which will define permitted admissions criteria for all post-primary schools, including those within the Dixon Plan, from 2010. If, however, no new legal framework can be established there will be no regulations permitting or prohibiting academic admissions criteria or prescribing the way such criteria should be used or what assessment mechanisms should support them.

Dickson Plan for Education

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education to detail how the legislative safeguards for academic

selection impact upon the academic assessment elements of pupil transfers in schools that operate in the Dickson Plan for Education area. (AQW 6639/08)

The Minister of Education: The legal framework for the present system of academic selection (including that of selective schools within the Dickson Plan) is in the Education Order 1997 and its supporting regulations. By virtue of the Education Order 2006, that legislative framework will lapse with effect from Transfer 2010.

Article 28(1) of the Education Order 2006 gives the Department the power to specify, through regulations, the admissions criteria that schools may use. Article 28(2) of the Education Order precludes the Department from including academic admissions criteria in any future permitted admissions. Article 28(2) has not been commenced.

Tá mé ag iarraidh comhaontú a fháil ar rialacháin do chritéir nua iontrála a shonróidh critéir cheadaithe iontrála do gach iar-bhunscoil, agus iad siúd i bPlean Dixon san áireamh, ó 2010 i leith.

I am seeking to establish agreement for new admissions criteria regulations which will define permitted admissions criteria for all post-primary schools, including those within the Dixon Plan, from 2010. If, however, no new legal framework can be established there will be no regulations permitting or prohibiting academic admissions criteria or prescribing the way such criteria should be used or what assessment mechanisms should support them.

Irish Language Schools

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding she has allocated to Irish language schools over the last two years, and the purpose of this funding. (AQW 6685/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuirtear mionsonraí ar fáil sna táblaí thíos ar an mhaoiniú a tugadh do scoileanna/aonaid Lán-Ghaeilge sa bhliain 2005/06 agus 2006/07 agus feidhm an mhaoinithe seo. Níl mionsonraí maoinithe do 2007/08 ar fáil go fóill.

The tables below provide details of the funding allocated to Irish medium schools/units in 2005/06 and 2006/07 and the purpose of this funding. Funding details for 2007/08 is not yet available.

2006/07

Grant-aided expenditure	£9,792,400
Capital expenditure	£278,623
Extended Schools programme	£224,302
Additional funding to Irish medium units	£108,000
School Improvement Programme	£8,500

Total	£10,411,825
--------------	--------------------

2005/06

Grant-aided expenditure	£9,388,813
Capital expenditure	£2,057,054
Additional funding to Irish medium units	£104,000
School Improvement Programme	£30,000
Total	£11,579,867

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to confirm (i) if the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism has been evaluated by (a) the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland; or (b) the equivalent office in the Republic of Ireland, at any time since its inception in 2002; and (ii) if she will make the reports available to Assembly Members. (AQW 6705/08)

The Minister of Education: Is féidir liom a dheimhniú ó tionscnaíodh Ionad Uathachais an Bhaile Láir i 2002 nach ndearna an tArd-Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste sa Tuaisceart ná an tArd-Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste sa Deisceart measúnú foirmiúil ar an Ionad agus mar sin de, níl aon tuarascálacha le cur ar fáil.

I can confirm that since the inception of the Middletown Centre for Autism in 2002 neither the Comptroller and Auditor General in the North nor the Comptroller and Auditor General in the South have conducted a formal evaluation of the Centre, therefore, there are no reports to be made available.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the core throughput at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism in terms of (i) number of courses; (ii) duration of courses; and (iii) the size of intake; and to clarify (a) if she will extrapolate the costs across a 52 week year for all those who are on the Autism Spectrum throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and (b) if she is working to an equality agenda. (AQW 6723/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé beartaithe ag Ionad Uathachais an Bhaile Láir ceithre chroísheirbhís a chur ar fáil – Seirbhís Tacaithe le Foghlaim, Seirbhís Mheasúnaithe Oideachais, Seirbhís Oiliúna agus Chomhairleach agus Seirbhís Taighde agus Forbartha.

The Middletown Centre for Autism is planning to provide four core services, Learning Support Service,

Educational Assessment Service, Training and Advisory Service and a Research and Development Service.

The Learning Support Service will be concerned with the multi-disciplinary assessment leading to the development of enhanced Individual Education Plans for children/young people referred to the Centre.

The service is designed to provide residential placement at the Centre for five weeks on a 5-day week basis. It is envisaged that two cohorts of 20 children/young people will be dealt with concurrently. It is expected that in the course of one academic year, the Learning Support Service will see 7 cohorts of 20 children/young people; each attending for 5 weeks at a time thereby assessing a total of 140 children per annum.

The Educational Assessment Service will enable comprehensive assessment of children who will attend the Centre with their parents. It is envisaged that this will generally involve attendance for two consecutive days for up to four children/young people at one time in the Educational Assessment Centre. Overnight accommodation will be in private apartments for each of the four children/young people with their parent/carer/family members as appropriate. The Educational Assessment Service will, over a period of time, develop its capacity to provide for up to 180 assessments per year of children/young people.

The Middletown Centre's Training and Advisory Service has two main functions:-

1. To provide training and advice to parents and professionals regarding the implementation of strategies devised to meet the needs of the children and young people referred to the Centre.
2. To identify training needs of parents and professionals arising from the Centre's research and development work and to facilitate meeting these needs in collaboration with others.

Specifically designed training will be given on an individual basis to the parents and professionals working with individual children to help them support the strategies devised at the Centre to meet the individual needs of each child/young person assessed by the Centre.

As a specialist autism support service the Centre will devise training programmes and develop a training prospectus as a result of needs identified by those working in the field of autism. Links will be made with universities and colleges to develop accredited training programmes. Courses will vary in length depending on the areas being covered but half day, full day and two day courses are likely to be offered.

It is likely that approximately two courses will be held each month. Current accommodation can accommodate groups of delegates ranging from 15 - 30.

With regards to the second part of your question, there are currently 2962 children at Stages 3-5 of the Code of Practice assessed as having a special educational need as a result of having an autistic spectrum disorder and I have been advised by Department of Education and Science officials in the South that there are approximately 3990 children with autism in their schools and special classes. The overall running costs of all four services delivered by the Centre are estimated to be in the region of £3million per annum.

Finally, I am of course committed to the equality agenda. I am particularly keen to ensure that all children, and especially those with special educational needs, fully realise their individual potential. The vision of the Department of Education is 'to ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential'. Considerations of equality are therefore central to everything that the Department does in relation to children and young people affected by educational disadvantage.

Home Schooling

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children that are being schooled at home. (AQW 6740/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on children that are being schooled at home. Parents of every child of compulsory school age are legally required to ensure that they receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude; either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision.

I understand, however, that the Education and Library Boards are currently aware of 166 children, of compulsory school age, who are presently being educated at home. The Boards calculate these figures from their databases which contain received notifications that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made from parents, a child's previous school, the Board's transfer department or its Education Welfare Service.

When a Board receives notification of a child who is being home educated, an officer will make an initial call to the child's parent to clarify the situation. At times, this initial call may lead to the parent having a change of mind. If not, the parent is offered a

range of dates for a home visit by the officer, often accompanied by an Education Welfare Officer.

Officers will check what sort of education provision is offered and provide general guidance on appropriate materials and exam types. The officer will also leave a contact number for any future advice. Board officers will monitor progress by carrying out annual home visits to discuss the provision and determine if the education provided is suited to the child's age, aptitude and ability. Parents are also often asked to submit an annual report to the Board to ensure the child is progressing.

Tuairiscítear aon ábhair inní a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag oifigeach faoi leorgacht an tsoláthair oideachais leis an tSeirbhís Chomhairleach don Churaclam (SCC). Mar fhreagairt ar atreorú ón Bhord, cuirfidh SCC comhairle ar fáil ar sholáthar curaclaim do dhaltai a fhaigheann oideachas sa bhaile.

Any concerns an officer may have regarding the adequacy of the education provision are reported to Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). CASS will provide advice on curricular provision for home educated pupils in response to a referral from the Board.

Home Schooling

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what process is used to calculate the number of children being schooled at home. (AQW 6741/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on children that are being schooled at home. Parents of every child of compulsory school age are legally required to ensure that they receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude; either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision.

I understand, however, that the Education and Library Boards are currently aware of 166 children, of compulsory school age, who are presently being educated at home. The Boards calculate these figures from their databases which contain received notifications that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made from parents, a child's previous school, the Board's transfer department or its Education Welfare Service.

When a Board receives notification of a child who is being home educated, an officer will make an initial call to the child's parent to clarify the situation. At times, this initial call may lead to the parent having a change of mind. If not, the parent is offered a

range of dates for a home visit by the officer, often accompanied by an Education Welfare Officer.

Officers will check what sort of education provision is offered and provide general guidance on appropriate materials and exam types. The officer will also leave a contact number for any future advice. Board officers will monitor progress by carrying out annual home visits to discuss the provision and determine if the education provided is suited to the child's age, aptitude and ability. Parents are also often asked to submit an annual report to the Board to ensure the child is progressing.

Tuairiscítear aon ábhair inní a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag oifigeach faoi leorgacht an tsoláthair oideachais leis an tSeirbhís Chomhairleach don Churaclam (SCC). Mar fhreagairt ar atreorú ón Bhord, cuirfidh SCC comhairle ar fáil ar sholáthar curaclaim do dhaltai a fhaigheann oideachas sa bhaile.

Any concerns an officer may have regarding the adequacy of the education provision are reported to Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). CASS will provide advice on curricular provision for home educated pupils in response to a referral from the Board.

Home Schooling

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what process is undertaken by her Department to ensure that children being schooled at home are receiving an adequate education. (AQW 6742/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on children that are being schooled at home. Parents of every child of compulsory school age are legally required to ensure that they receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude; either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision.

I understand, however, that the Education and Library Boards are currently aware of 166 children, of compulsory school age, who are presently being educated at home. The Boards calculate these figures from their databases which contain received notifications that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made from parents, a child's previous school, the Board's transfer department or its Education Welfare Service.

When a Board receives notification of a child who is being home educated, an officer will make an initial call to the child's parent to clarify the situation. At times, this initial call may lead to the parent having a change of mind. If not, the parent is offered a

range of dates for a home visit by the officer, often accompanied by an Education Welfare Officer.

Officers will check what sort of education provision is offered and provide general guidance on appropriate materials and exam types. The officer will also leave a contact number for any future advice. Board officers will monitor progress by carrying out annual home visits to discuss the provision and determine if the education provided is suited to the child's age, aptitude and ability. Parents are also often asked to submit an annual report to the Board to ensure the child is progressing.

Tuairiscítear aon ábhair inní a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag oifigeach faoi leorgacht an tsoláthair oideachais leis an tSeirbhís Chomhairleach don Churaclam (SCC). Mar fhreagairt ar atreorú ón Bhord, cuirfidh SCC comhairle ar fáil ar sholáthar curaclaim do dhaltai a fhaigheann oideachas sa bhaile.

Any concerns an officer may have regarding the adequacy of the education provision are reported to Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). CASS will provide advice on curricular provision for home educated pupils in response to a referral from the Board.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to confirm if she has a legal obligation to retain a special needs unit at Donaghadee High School. (AQW 6743/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon oibleagáid dhlíthiúil ann aonad sainriachtanas a choinneáil ag Ard-Scoil Dhomhnach Daoi.

There is no legal obligation to retain a special needs unit at Donaghadee High School. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that, in the event that the Development Proposal to close the school is approved, it would work closely with parents to find appropriate alternative placement for pupils with special needs.

Travel Time to Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the maximum distance a child should have to travel to go to school. (AQW 6744/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní chuimsíonn an beartas reatha ar iompar ón bhaile chun na scoile uasachar taistil.

The current home to school transport policy does not include a maximum travel distance. Instead, the policy indicates that Education and Library Boards should, where possible, consider factors such as the age of the pupils, whether it would entail an unduly early start or late ending to the pupil's period of

absence from home, the duration of the journey and distance to and from the pupil's home or connection point when assessing the suitability of the means of transport for eligible pupils.

Post-Primary Education Research Costs

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education to detail the total amount of money spent to date by her department on research into post-primary education. (AQW 6745/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó 8 Bealtaine 2007 go dtí seo ní raibh aon chaiteachas seachtrach ag an Roinn Oideachais ar thaighde ar oideachas iar-bhunscoile.

From 8 May 2007 to date there has been no external expenditure by the Department of Education on research into post-primary education.

All research undertaken on post-primary education in this period has been undertaken by civil servants as part of their regular duties in developing and reviewing policy.

Departmental Publications

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education whether mechanisms are in place to monitor the extent to which her Department's (i) internal; and (ii) external, (a) correspondence; and (b) distribution of publications, are carried out electronically. (AQW 6752/08)

The Minister of Education: Gí nach bhfuil meicníochtaí ag mo Roinn le monatóireacht fhoirmiúil a dhéanamh ar an mhéid comhfhreagrais agus dáileachán foilseachán a dhéanann sí go leictreonach, tá cleachtais ghnó leictreonaigh á gcur i bhfeidhm.

While my Department does not have mechanisms in place to formally monitor the extent to which it corresponds and distributes publications electronically, electronic business practices have been adopted.

Where possible my Department corresponds and shares information electronically, both internally and externally, to organisations such as schools, the wider education sector, other NICS Departments and members of the public. Departmental publications are available on the website and the general public can contact DE via the Departmental electronic mail box.

Irish Language Officer

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5625/08, to detail the job description and role of the Irish language

officer who is to be employed by her Department.
(AQW 6774/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Sonraí/Ról an phoist Ghaeilge sa Leabhrán Eolais d'Iarrthóirí a ullmhaíodh don chomórtas earcaíochta. D'iarr mé go gcuirfí cóip den leabhrán seo i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

The Job Description/Role for the Irish Language post is contained in the Candidate Information Booklet prepared for the recruitment competition. I have asked that a copy of this booklet is placed in the Assembly Library.

GCSE Irish History

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools that teach Irish history as part of their GCSE curriculum. (AQW 6803/08)

The Minister of Education: In 2007, 207 schools entered pupils for GCSE history qualification. The local awarding body, the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), offers GCSE history with Irish history as a compulsory element. 156 schools entered for this qualification in 2007 with 6,035 entrants.

GCSE history may also be offered by other awarding bodies and they have included advice to schools in their existing specifications that Irish history should be taken to meet statutory requirements in relation to programmes of study which were in place before the introduction of the revised curriculum. 51 schools offered GCSE history under awarding bodies other than CCEA in 2007.

Is é 8,293 ar fud 207 scoil, an líon iomlán iontrálacha a thairg gach foras gradam, lena n-áirítear CCEA, do stair GCSE sa bhliain 2007.

The total number of entries for GCSE history in 2007 offered by all awarding bodies, including CCEA, was 8,293 across 207 schools.

St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's College in Banbridge

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to detail when she will be in a position to make an announcement in relation to new builds at St. Mary's Primary School, Banbridge and St. Patrick's Secondary School, Banbridge. (AQW 6806/08)

The Minister of Education: Ceadaíodh tionscadail chaipitil foirgneamh nua do Bhunscoil Mhuire agus Coláiste Phádraig, Droichead na Banna i Márta 2006.

Approval of the capital new build projects for St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's College, Banbridge was given in March 2006.

Planning of both schemes has reached Stage C proposals (initial outline sketch plans and costs) recently being approved for both. It is estimated that construction work on both could start in the 2008/09 financial year and complete in 2010/11. The timescale for progressing these projects is of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily, and the availability of resources in any particular year.

Nursery School Places in Saintfield

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from the Saintfield area that (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Saintfield; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Saintfield. (AQW 6827/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscolaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2nd May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2nd May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2nd May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Saintfield

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of funded nursery school places in Saintfield. (AQW 6828/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 52 ionad reachtúil in aonad náiscolaíochta a bhfuil ceangal aige le bunscoil i dTamhnaigh Naomh.

There are 52 statutory nursery places in a nursery unit attached to a primary school in Saintfield. In

addition, there are 12 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Nursery School Places in Comber

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from the Comber area that (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Comber; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Comber. (AQW 6829/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscolaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Comber

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding that will be made available to address the need for additional nursery school places within the Comber town area. (AQW 6830/08)

The Minister of Education: Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards are now going through the re-allocation of places process i.e. those places returned following completion of the admissions process on 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Leanfaidh SEELB de mhonatóireacht a dhéanamh ar sholáthar réamhscolaíochta ina gceantar, Baile an Chomair san áireamh, le tabhairt faoi aon ghá atá le háiteanna breise réamhscoile, má aithnítear a leithéid.

The SEELB will continue to monitor pre-school provision in their area, including Comber town, in order to address any need for additional pre-school places if identified.

Nursery School Places in Comber

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of funded nursery school places in Comber. (AQW 6831/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 52 ionad reachtúil in aonad naíscolaíochta a bhfuil ceangal aige le bunscoil ar an Chomar.

There are 52 statutory nursery places in a nursery unit attached to a primary school in Comber. In addition, there are 15 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Down High School in Downpatrick

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education to make a statement on the current situation in relation to the planning application for a new build school for Down High School, Downpatrick. (AQW 6832/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá ráite ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oir-Dheiscirt (SEELB) go bhfuil siad ag ullmhú cead pleanála faoi choinne suímh ar Bhóthar Loch Cuan i nDún Pádraig.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that it is currently preparing a planning permission for a site on the Strangford Road in Downpatrick.

Primary and Post-Primary School Absences

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many; and (ii) the percentage, of pupils in (a) primary schools; (b) secondary schools; (c) grammar schools; (d) integrated schools; and (e) maintained schools, who have been absent from school for more than five days per year in each of the last five years, broken down by Education Board area. (AQW 6880/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not currently collect the information sought. Since September 2006, a new standardised system of recording absences has been used in schools, following an update of the Attendance Module of the

Classroom 2000 (C2K) system. This enables schools to record the reasons for pupils' absences and whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

The Department had planned to collect this new data with the Annual School Census in October 2007. However additional software is required to facilitate the transfer of detailed, yet anonymised, attendance data to the Department for analysis. This software has been commissioned and the intention is to collect data for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years during the Census in October 2008.

A separate exercise took place earlier this year to collect detailed attendance data from all post-primary schools. This data has now been analysed and will be published on the Department's website in the coming weeks. This information and the data from both primary and post-primary schools that will be collected in October 2008 will be used to inform the setting of targets on pupil attendance. Once targets have been developed, the Department will issue guidance to schools on how best to promote regular attendance and on approaches to early and effective intervention.

The Department does collect information from the Education and Library Boards about pupils referred due to concerns around non-attendance. This information is collected at the end of each school year and is published on the Department's website. The Education and Welfare Service will receive a referral from a school when a pupil's attendance pattern causes concern. When a referral is received, an Education Welfare Officer will arrange a home visit to speak with the pupil and their parent/carer(s).

Athróidh an beart a dhéanfar nó an chomhairle a thabharfar de réir gach cáis aonair.

The action taken or advice given will vary according to each individual case.

Primary and Post-Primary School Absences

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education what action she has taken to reduce truancy, and any further plans she has to tackle this problem. (AQW 6881/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not currently collect the information sought. Since September 2006, a new standardised system of recording absences has been used in schools, following an update of the Attendance Module of the Classroom 2000 (C2K) system. This enables schools to record the reasons for pupils' absences and whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

The Department had planned to collect this new data with the Annual School Census in October 2007. However additional software is required to facilitate

the transfer of detailed, yet anonymised, attendance data to the Department for analysis. This software has been commissioned and the intention is to collect data for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years during the Census in October 2008.

A separate exercise took place earlier this year to collect detailed attendance data from all post-primary schools. This data has now been analysed and will be published on the Department's website in the coming weeks. This information and the data from both primary and post-primary schools that will be collected in October 2008 will be used to inform the setting of targets on pupil attendance. Once targets have been developed, the Department will issue guidance to schools on how best to promote regular attendance and on approaches to early and effective intervention.

The Department does collect information from the Education and Library Boards about pupils referred due to concerns around non-attendance. This information is collected at the end of each school year and is published on the Department's website. The Education and Welfare Service will receive a referral from a school when a pupil's attendance pattern causes concern. When a referral is received, an Education Welfare Officer will arrange a home visit to speak with the pupil and their parent/carer(s).

Athróidh an beart a dhéanfar nó an chomhairle a thabharfar de réir gach cáis aonair.

The action taken or advice given will vary according to each individual case.

Nursery School Places

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of children that were refused free nursery places for funded places within the same district council area, broken down by district council area. (AQW 6894/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní féidir leis na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an t-eolas seo a sholáthar i bhformáid chomhsheasmhach.

This information cannot be provided in a consistent format by the five Education and Library Boards.

What I can confirm, is that in the 2007/08 academic year, there are 21,118 children in funded pre-school education. The school projection model predicts 22,464 P1 pupils in September 2008. This would indicate that the pre-school phase overall level of provision is running at 94%.

As not every parent wants to avail of a pre-school place for their children, and as the pre-school phase of

education is not compulsory, this level of provision is considered sufficient to meet demand.

Youth Club Leaders in the Foyle Constituency

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many full-time leaders have been employed in youth clubs in the Foyle constituency in each year since 1993. (AQW 6895/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the five Education and Library Boards and the Bytes Project which employ leaders in youth clubs across the north of Ireland.

Chuir Príomh-Fheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair agus Stiúrthóir Bytes an t-eolas seo a leanas ar fáil ar an líon ceannasaithe lánaimseartha a fostaíodh i gcumainn óige i dToghlaigh Feabhail ó 1993 i leith:

The Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board and the Director of Bytes provided the following information on the number of full-time leaders who have been employed in youth clubs in the Foyle Constituency since 1993:

Year	Nos. of full-time leaders (WELB) ¹	No of full-time leaders (Bytes) ¹	Total
1993/94	20	0	20
1994/95	20	0	20
1995/96	20	0	20
1996/97	20	0	20
1997/98	15	1	16
1998/99	14	0	14
1999/00	13	0	13
2000/01	15	0	15
2001/02	17	1	18
2002/03	17	0	17
2003/04	17	2	19
2004/05	17	1	18
2005/06	16	0	16
2006/07	17	2	19
2007/08	16	1	17

1. Information from the WELB relates to the financial year and from Bytes relates to the calendar year, for example 1993/94 relates to the 1993 calendar year

Pupil Profiles in Primary Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of introducing pupil profiles in primary classes in 2007-2008. (AQW 6896/08)

The Minister of Education: Dar leis an Chomhairle Curaclaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Measúnachta, caitheadh timpeall is £110,000 ar oiliúint agus ar thacaíocht do mhúinteoirí Bhliain 1 agus Bhliain 5 maidir le Próifílí Daltaí a thabhairt isteach sa bhliain 2007/08.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment advises that the cost of training and support for Year 1 and Year 5 teachers in relation to the introduction of Pupil Profiles in 2007/08 was approximately £110,000.

Nursery School Places in Carryduff

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many children from the Carryduff area (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Carryduff; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Carryduff. (AQW 6897/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscolaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Killyleagh

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many children from the Killyleagh area (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Killyleagh; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Killyleagh. (AQW 6898/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscolaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Carryduff

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many funded nursery school places there are in Carryduff. (AQW 6899/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 104 ionad reachtúil naíscolaíochta in aonaid naíscolaíochta a bhfuil ceangal acu le bunscoileanna i gCeathrú Aodha Dhuibh.

There are 104 statutory nursery places in nursery units attached to primary schools in Carryduff. In addition, there are 26 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Nursery School Places in Killyleagh

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many funded nursery school places there are in Killyleagh. (AQW 6900/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon naíscoileanna reachtúla ná aonaid reachtúla a bhfuil ceangal acu le bunscoileanna i gCoillidh Léith.

There are no statutory nursery schools or units attached to primary schools in Killyleagh. There are 23 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Nursery School Places in Dundonald

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many funded nursery school places there are in Dundonald. (AQW 6901/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 130 ionad reachtúil naíscolaíochta i naíscoileanna agus in aonaid a bhfuil ceangal acu le bunscoileanna i nDún Dhónaill.

There are 130 statutory nursery places in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools in Dundonald. In addition, there are 23 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Funded Nursery School Places

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what is the mechanism for appeal where a funded nursery school place has been refused. (AQW 6915/08)

The Minister of Education: If a parent wishes to appeal the refusal of a place at a grant-aided pre-school (i.e. a nursery school or nursery unit of a primary school) they should contact the appropriate education and library board (ELB) for information on the appeal procedure including the deadline for appeals. The appeal procedure involves the parent writing to the ELB within the deadline indicating the parent's intention to appeal against the named nursery school or nursery unit.

The appeal will then be heard by an Independent Admissions Appeal Tribunal which will consider whether the pre-school's admissions criteria were applied or were correctly applied in deciding to refuse a child admission to the school. If the Tribunal determine that the criteria were not applied or were not correctly applied and that if they had been (correctly) applied the child would have been admitted, they will direct the pre-school to admit the child. If not they will not uphold the appeal.

If a parent wishes to appeal the refusal of a funded pre-school place at a playgroup or private day nursery, they should contact the provider.

Ós rud é nach scoileanna faoi chúnamh deontais na soláthraithe seo tá a ngnáthaimh iontrála lasmuigh de théarmaí tagartha na reachtaíochta rollaithe oscailte lena n-áirítear a gnáthaimh achomhairc.

As these providers are not grant-aided schools their admissions procedures are outside the remit of the open enrolment legislation including its appeal procedures.

Grammar School Entrance Exams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many grammar schools have not indicated that they intend to set their own academic selection test.

(AQW 6916/08)

The Minister of Education: Is ar bhonn neamhspleách ón Roinn Oideachais agus ón

Chomhairle Churacalaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Mheasúnachta atá moltaí roinnt scoileanna gramadaí chun scrúduithe iontrála a thabhairt isteach á dtabhairt chun cinn.

The proposals by a number of grammar schools to introduce entrance examinations are being taken forward independently of the Department of Education and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. The Department therefore has no involvement in these proposals and only has knowledge of them from press reports.

Press reports on 20 March indicated that one grammar school proposes to introduce an entrance examination for admissions in September 2010. In addition, in a press release issued by the Association for Quality Education on 23 April, it was stated that thirty grammar schools (not including the one mentioned above) had agreed to the establishment of a corporate mechanism to deliver a common entrance examination. This gives a total of thirty-one. There are sixty-nine grammar schools in the North.

Grammar School Entrance Exams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many grammar schools have indicated that they intend to set their own academic selection test. (AQW 6917/08)

The Minister of Education: Is ar bhonn neamhspleách ón Roinn Oideachais agus ón Chomhairle Churacalaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Mheasúnachta atá moltaí roinnt scoileanna gramadaí chun scrúduithe iontrála a thabhairt isteach á dtabhairt chun cinn.

The proposals by a number of grammar schools to introduce entrance examinations are being taken forward independently of the Department of Education and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. The Department therefore has no involvement in these proposals and only has knowledge of them from press reports.

Press reports on 20 March indicated that one grammar school proposes to introduce an entrance examination for admissions in September 2010. In addition, in a press release issued by the Association for Quality Education on 23 April, it was stated that thirty grammar schools (not including the one mentioned above) had agreed to the establishment of a corporate mechanism to deliver a common entrance examination. This gives a total of thirty-one. There are sixty-nine grammar schools in the North.

Grammar Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many grammar schools are in operation. (AQW 6918/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 69 scoil ghradamach ag feidhmiú i 2007/08.

There are 69 grammar schools in operation in 2007/08.

Secondary Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many secondary schools are in operation. (AQW 6919/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 157 meánscoil ag feidhmiú i 2007/08.

There are 157 secondary schools in operation in 2007/08.

Nursery School Places in Hollywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children from the Hollywood area (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Hollywood; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Hollywood. (AQW 6972/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscolaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Donaghadee and Millisle

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children from the (i) Donaghadee; and (ii)

Millisle, areas (a) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Donaghadee or Millisle; and (b) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Donaghadee or Millisle. (AQW 6973/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscoilaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2nd May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2nd May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2nd May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Nursery School Places in Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children from the Bangor area (i) did not receive a funded nursery school place in Bangor; and (ii) are on the waiting list for a nursery school place in Bangor. (AQW 6975/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé róluath le rá, ar an ábhar go bhfuil an próiseas iontrála i dtaca le soláthar réamhscoilaíochta ag gabháil ar aghaidh go fóill.

It is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2 May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2 May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2 May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Donemana Primary School

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 458/07, what progress has been made in relation to the review of the economic appraisal for the replacement of Donemana Primary School. (AQW 6992/08)

The Minister of Education: D'Ullmhaigh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair breithmheas eacnamaíochta ar bhunscoil nua do Dhomhnach Manach sa bhliain 2006.

An economic appraisal for a replacement for Donemana Primary School was prepared by the Western Education and Library Board in 2006. The Department of Education requested that it be reviewed to confirm that the scheme would be required for the area. The Western Education and Library Board has not yet submitted a revised appraisal to the Department.

Complaints in Schools

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6540/08, to provide a timescale for the creation of the single guidance document incorporating a model procedure. (AQW 7027/08)

The Minister of Education: Mar a thug mé le fios sa fhreagra a thug mé ní ba luaithe, tá na húdaráis fostaíochta freagrach as na nósanna imeachta treorach agus samhla a chur chun cinn.

As indicated in my earlier answer, the production of the guidance and model procedures is a matter for the employing authorities to progress. However, my Department has asked the employing authorities to ensure that this work is completed as soon as possible.

Free School Meals

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2006-07 and 2007-08 academic years, the number of free school meal entitlements in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, broken down by school. (AQW 7054/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS¹ IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY NURSERY SCHOOL, 2006/07

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4110029	Bangor Nursery School	19	79
4110030	Hollywood Nursery School	6	52
4110035	Newtownards Nursery School	7	52
4116018	Barbour Nursery School	11	52
4116175	Trinity Nursery School	*	82
4116176	Downpatrick Nursery School	*	26
4116216	King's Road Nursery School	7	52
4116239	Knockbreeda Nursery School	*	52
4116240	Castlereagh Nursery School	7	52
4116307	Glenbrook Nursery School	8	78
4116418	Pond Park Nursery School	*	78
4136211	St Colmcille's Nursery School	26	78
4136212	St Patrick's Convent Nursery	19	78
4136286	Good Shepherd Nursery School	31	53
4136317	Holy Trinity Nursery School	7	54
4136368	St Luke's Nursery School	23	52
4136481	St Kieran's Nursery School	42	52
4136606	St Therese Nursery School	30	52
4136626	Kircubbin Community Nursery School	11	52

Note:

- 1 Free school meal entitlement for nursery school pupils is measured as those children who have a parent in receipt of Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance.

* relates to less than 5 cases.

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY PRIMARY SCHOOL¹, 2, 2006/07

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4010512	Mckinney PS	*	153
4010720	Ballycarrickmaddy PS	5	167
4010743	Largymore PS	49	146
4010762	Brownlee PS	21	154
4010788	Dunmurry PS	16	164
4010807	Lisburn Central PS	63	234
4010882	Seymour Hill PS	49	194
4010885	Tonagh PS	52	155
4011265	Ballyvester PS	*	73
4011267	Loughries PS	*	72
4011300	Grey Abbey PS	5	76
4011310	Carrickmannon PS	0	87
4011345	Newtownards Model PS	65	375
4011373	Kirkistown PS	7	101
4011462	Castle Gardens PS	43	344
4011488	Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert)	12	136
4011507	Portavogie PS	13	197
4011508	Charley Memorial PS	*	10
4011566	Ballywalter PS	16	175
4011567	Ballynahinch PS	28	357
4011578	Derryboy PS	*	80
4011582	Crossgar PS	*	52
4011584	Carr PS	*	61
4011587	Dundonald PS	34	560
4011588	Comber PS	38	369
4011599	Castlewellan PS	8	75
4011606	Gilnahirk PS	28	393
4011608	Anahilt PS	7	215
4011610	Newtownbreda PS	24	144
4011619	Dromara PS	7	150
4011627	Lambeg PS	0	23
4011631	Hollywood PS	21	355
4011632	Cregagh PS	54	175
4011634	Killyleagh PS	15	99
4011645	Crawfordsburn PS	10	207

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4011646	Victoria PS	62	556
4011647	Ballykeigle PS	*	59
4011648	Hillhall PS	0	39
4011650	Ballyholme PS	18	591
4011654	Donaghadee PS	30	417
4011657	Lisnasharragh PS	51	227
4011670	Clandeboyne PS	55	227
4011674	Knockbreda PS	11	129
4011678	Ballycloughan PS	*	47
4011681	Millisle PS	21	143
4011683	Braniel PS	35	369
4011686	Drumbo PS	0	12
4011688	Redburn PS	17	117
4011698	Newcastle PS	28	193
4011699	Moneyrea PS	*	138
4013001	Groomspoint PS	6	25
4013013	Belvoir Park PS	43	289
4013016	Tyrella PS	6	53
4013023	Bloomfield Road PS	118	314
4013024	Cairnshill PS	14	515
4013032	Conlig PS	10	46
4013038	Tullycarnet PS	51	107
4013043	Lead Hill PS	5	141
4013044	Carryduff PS	11	157
4013045	Grange Park PS	19	364
4013046	Alexander Dickson PS	*	153
4013305	Harmony Hill PS	13	631
4013308	Fort Hill PS	43	260
4013309	Derriaghy PS	21	53
4013334	Knockmore PS	56	163
4016002	Kilcooley PS	83	138
4016004	Londonderry PS	52	313
4016020	Carrowdore PS	16	141
4016067	Rathmore PS	16	477
4016083	West Winds PS	70	156
4016104	Moirra PS	15	357
4016111	Towerview PS	17	370
4016123	Spa PS	*	183

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4016126	Andrews Memorial PS	11	366
4016144	Old Warren PS	76	127
4016145	Killowen PS	36	376
4016192	Kilmaine PS	23	654
4016201	Academy PS	10	423
4016202	Lower Ballinderry PS	7	186
4016235	Downpatrick PS	49	201
4016396	Killinchy PS	5	309
4016399	Abbey PS	72	623
4016401	Pond Park PS	18	572
4016417	Maghaberry PS	5	262
4016430	Ballymagee PS	21	403
4016441	Ballymacash PS	46	354
4016503	Brooklands PS	116	598
4016615	Riverdale PS	*	188
4016636	Meadow Bridge PS	*	247
4016649	Downshire PS	12	501
4016650	Cumran Primary School	16	157
4030573	Ballymacward PS	*	96
4030823	Ballymacrickett PS	15	303
4030897	St Joseph's PS	26	274
4031231	St Joseph's PS	12	53
4031295	Guinness PS	*	22
4031328	Christ The King PS	17	130
4031350	St Malachy's PS	11	60
4031384	Convent of Mercy PS	53	220
4031485	St Caolan's	0	71
4031526	St Patrick's PS	10	128
4031531	St Francis' PS	*	33
4031550	St Joseph's PS	10	120
4031628	St Patrick's PS	7	252
4031644	St Patrick's Boys' PS	63	305
4031660	St Joseph's PS	10	480
4031662	St Mary's PS	0	37
4031663	St Joseph's PS	23	151
4031665	St Patrick's PS	52	250
4031671	St Patrick's PS	5	47

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4031672	St Mary's PS	11	70
4031673	St Mary's PS	24	85
4031676	St Bernard's PS	*	388
4031693	St Colman's PS	*	20
4033002	St Mary's Aughlisnafin	19	133
4033005	St Joseph's PS	7	56
4033007	St Macartan's PS	20	166
4033008	St Anne's PS	*	34
4033012	The Holy Family PS	6	201
4033017	St Finian's PS	6	126
4033028	St Patrick's PS	*	89
4033029	St Mary's PS	0	3
4033036	St Mary's PS	26	126
4033037	St Joseph's PS	10	75
4033040	St Brigid's PS	28	154
4033306	St Aloysius PS	35	277
4033307	St Colman's PS	30	316
4036016	St Joseph's PS	20	82
4036036	St Malachy's PS	16	118
4036081	St Luke's PS	172	226
4036113	St Nicholas' PS	36	128
4036133	Sacred Heart PS	18	82
4036134	St Mark's PS	257	522
4036146	St Comgall's PS	11	287
4036148	St Malachy's PS	65	362
4036182	St Colmcille's PS	119	211
4036285	The Good Shepherd PS	223	366
4036428	St Mary's PS	17	122
4036454	St Malachy's PS	64	291
4036455	Legamaddy PS	15	183
4036480	St Kieran's PS	318	437
4036530	St Mary's PS	25	236
4036591	Our Lady Queen of Peace PS	52	355
4036618	Christ The Redeemer PS	209	553
4036635	St Mary's PS	76	401
4036642	St Ita's Primary School	7	382

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4041545	Drumaghlis PS	0	36
4046600	Scoil Na Fuisioige	70	134
4046648	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	5	54
4050618	Hilden Integrated PS	9	51
4051569	Kircubbin PS	29	104
4051601	Portaferry Integrated PS	30	83
4051680	Bangor Central PS	94	561
4053009	Annsborough PS	7	51
4053020	Glencraig PS	0	226
4056541	All Children's Integrated PS	24	201
4066579	Loughview Integrated PS	20	434
4066588	Cedar Integrated PS	9	216
4066611	Oakwood Integrated PS	26	207
4066644	Millennium Integrated PS	11	173
4066668	Drumlins Integrated Primary School	*	36
4610063	Regent House School Prep. Dept.	0	137
4610085	Down High School Prep. Dept.	0	127
4610097	Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept.	*	71
4620015	Bangor Grammar School Prep. Dept.	0	132
4620044	Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept.	0	178
4620050	Friends School Prep. Dept.	0	153
4620051	Wallace High School Prep. Dept.	0	152

Note:

- 1 Free school meal entitlement for nursery class pupils measured as those children who have a parent in receipt of Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance or who are recorded as entitled to free school meals.
 - 2 Includes pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 - year 7 classes where applicable.
- * relates to less than 5 cases.

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL, 2006/07

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4210012	Movilla High School	139	652
4210029	The High School Ballynahinch	43	384
4210030	Lisnasharragh High School	93	193
4210031	Donaghadee High School	60	248
4210045	Comber High School	87	371
4210046	Glastry College	95	620
4210051	Lisnagarvey High School	117	322
4210063	Saintfield High School	19	343
4210086	Knockbreda High School	151	609
4210183	Newtownbreda High School	140	742
4210194	Dunmurry High School	130	326
4210201	Laurelhill Community College	112	952
4210262	Dundonald High School	126	375
4210296	Bangor Academy And 6th Form College	201	1329
4230023	St Mary's High School	124	546
4230067	St Columba's High School	45	288
4230102	St Colmcille's High School	67	460
4230107	St Columbanus' College	93	524
4230161	St Colman's High School	90	333
4230165	St Patrick's High School	114	302
4230211	St Malachy's High School	229	1005
4230223	St Colm's High School	420	701

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4230224	De La Salle Secondary School	138	376
4250024	Priory College	113	421
4250072	Fort Hill College	120	868
4250272	Down Academy	80	274
4260255	Lagan College	133	1156
4260281	Shimna Integrated College	78	506
4260295	Strangford Integrated College	47	488
4410063	Regent House School	43	1385
4410085	Down High School	14	918
4410097	Glenlola Collegiate	31	1078
4420015	Bangor Gs	34	912
4420044	Sullivan Upper School	12	1066
4420050	Friends' School	12	976
4420051	Wallace High School	17	1165
4420086	Assumption Gs	46	907
4420088	St Patrick's Gs	36	716
4420259	Our Lady And St Patrick's College	16	1256

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY NURSERY SCHOOL, 2007/08

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4110029	Bangor Nursery School	17	78
4110030	Hollywood Nursery School	*	52
4110035	Newtownards Nursery School	6	52
4116018	Barbour Nursery School	7	52
4116175	Trinity Nursery School	*	55
4116176	Downpatrick Nursery School	*	26

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4116216	King's Road Nursery School	10	52
4116239	Knockbrea Nursery School	*	52
4116240	Castlereagh Nursery School	7	52
4116307	Glenbrook Nursery School	5	52
4116418	Pond Park Nursery School	*	79
4136211	St Colmcille's Nursery School	14	52
4136212	St Patrick's Convent Nursery	12	52
4136286	Good Shepherd Nursery School	21	53
4136317	Holy Trinity Nursery School	13	52
4136368	St Luke's Nursery School	33	53
4136481	St Kieran's Nursery School	41	52
4136606	St Therese Nursery School	29	52
4136626	Kircubbin Community Nursery School	*	52

Note:

- 1 Free school meal entitlement for nursery school pupils measured as those children who have a parent in receipt of Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance.

* relates to less than 5 cases.

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY PRIMARY SCHOOL¹, 2, 2007/08

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4010512	Mckinney PS	*	150
4010720	Ballycarrickmaddy PS	8	158
4010743	Largymore PS	48	139
4010762	Brownlee PS	19	160
4010788	Dunmurry PS	14	158
4010807	Lisburn Central PS	57	204

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4010882	Seymour Hill PS	34	174
4010885	Tonagh PS	49	152
4011265	Ballyvester PS	*	67
4011267	Loughries PS	0	72
4011300	Grey Abbey PS	*	72
4011310	Carrickmannon PS	0	90
4011345	Newtownards Model PS	94	387
4011373	Kirkistown PS	*	108
4011462	Castle Gardens PS	36	326
4011488	Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert)	16	138
4011507	Portavogie PS	12	207
4011566	Ballywalter PS	26	175
4011567	Ballynahinch PS	28	332
4011578	Derryboy PS	5	80
4011584	Carr PS	*	68
4011587	Dundonald PS	32	572
4011588	Comber PS	41	356
4011599	Castlewellan PS	8	73
4011606	Gilnahirk PS	37	396
4011608	Anahilt PS	7	188
4011610	Newtownbreda PS	22	121
4011619	Dromara PS	11	162
4011631	Hollywood PS	26	332
4011632	Cregagh PS	61	177
4011634	Killyleagh PS	23	93
4011645	Crawfordsburn PS	16	188
4011646	Victoria PS	57	573
4011647	Ballykeigle PS	0	59
4011650	Ballyholme PS	23	600
4011654	Donaghadee PS	35	418
4011657	Lisnasharragh PS	44	202
4011670	Clandeboy PS	41	188
4011674	Knockbreda PS	17	131
4011678	Ballycloughan PS	*	37
4011681	Millisle PS	24	146
4011683	Braniel PS	36	362

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4011688	Redburn PS	19	83
4011698	Newcastle PS	21	191
4011699	Moneyrea PS	*	142
4013013	Belvoir Park PS	56	290
4013016	Tyrella PS	*	32
4013023	Bloomfield Road PS	113	307
4013024	Cairnshill PS	14	507
4013032	Conlig PS	10	43
4013038	Tullycarnet PS	45	88
4013043	Lead Hill PS	5	143
4013044	Carryduff PS	9	165
4013045	Grange Park PS	15	364
4013046	Alexander Dickson PS	*	125
4013305	Harmony Hill PS	16	614
4013308	Fort Hill PS	48	239
4013309	Derriaghy PS	26	43
4013334	Knockmore PS	53	163
4016002	Kilcooley PS	84	127
4016004	Londonderry PS	60	315
4016020	Carrowdore PS	14	133
4016067	Rathmore PS	25	482
4016083	West Winds PS	53	143
4016104	Moirra PS	17	363
4016111	Towerview PS	20	385
4016123	Spa PS	*	175
4016126	Andrews Memorial PS	10	346
4016144	Old Warren PS	72	117
4016145	Killowen PS	45	371
4016192	Kilmaine PS	18	654
4016201	Academy PS	12	422
4016202	Lower Ballinderry PS	*	175
4016235	Downpatrick PS	48	213
4016396	Killinchy PS	5	320
4016399	Abbey PS	79	618
4016401	Pond Park PS	18	551
4016417	Maghaberry PS	5	264

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4016430	Ballymagee PS	23	404
4016441	Ballymacash PS	40	366
4016503	Brooklands PS	116	575
4016615	Riverdale PS	*	188
4016636	Meadow Bridge PS	8	243
4016649	Downshire PS	15	538
4016650	Cumran Primary School	13	171
4016681	Glasswater Controlled PS	*	76
4030573	Ballymacward PS	7	93
4030823	Ballymacrickett PS	14	282
4030897	St Joseph's PS	24	288
4031231	St Joseph's PS	10	48
4031295	Guinness PS	*	18
4031328	Christ The King PS	17	105
4031350	St Malachy's PS	13	64
4031384	Convent of Mercy PS	54	201
4031485	St Caolan's	0	64
4031526	St Patrick's PS	8	142
4031531	St Francis' PS	5	36
4031550	St Joseph's PS	13	108
4031628	St Patrick's PS	12	237
4031644	St Patrick's Boys' PS	73	306
4031660	St Joseph's PS	12	452
4031662	St Mary's PS	0	42
4031663	St Joseph's PS	26	150
4031665	St Patrick's PS	51	257
4031671	St Patrick's PS	*	46
4031672	St Mary's PS	11	60
4031673	St Mary's PS	23	89
4031676	St Bernard's PS	8	394
4031693	St Colman's PS	*	18
4033002	St Mary's Aughlisnafin	16	133
4033005	St Joseph's PS	6	57
4033007	St Macartan's PS	17	175
4033008	St Anne's PS	*	34

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4033012	The Holy Family PS	6	191
4033017	St Finian's PS	9	123
4033028	St Patrick's PS	*	96
4033036	St Mary's PS	25	123
4033037	St Joseph's PS	9	74
4033040	St Brigid's PS	35	167
4033306	St Aloysius PS	41	284
4033307	St Colman's PS	29	301
4036016	St Joseph's PS	19	82
4036036	St Malachy's PS	10	122
4036081	St Luke's PS	163	222
4036113	St Nicholas' PS	33	122
4036133	Sacred Heart PS	21	79
4036134	St Mark's PS	243	480
4036146	St Comgall's PS	13	286
4036148	St Malachy's PS	62	321
4036182	St Colmcille's PS	118	216
4036285	The Good Shepherd PS	209	348
4036428	St Mary's PS	17	125
4036454	St Malachy's PS	64	293
4036455	Legamaddy PS	22	176
4036480	St Kieran's PS	284	387
4036530	St Mary's PS	21	228
4036591	Our Lady Queen of Peace PS	54	383
4036618	Christ The Redeemer PS	201	574
4036635	St Mary's PS	92	384
4036642	St Ita's Primary School	5	427
4046600	Scoil Na Fuisseoige	67	133
4046648	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	6	48
4050618	Hilden Integrated PS	5	36
4051569	Kircubbin PS	22	105
4051601	Portaferry Integrated PS	24	81
4051680	Bangor Central PS	99	562
4053009	Annsborough PS	5	50

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4053020	Glencraig PS	*	228
4056541	All Children's Integrated PS	22	199
4066579	Loughview Integrated PS	12	433
4066588	Cedar Integrated PS	10	222
4066611	Oakwood Integrated PS	28	209
4066644	Millennium Integrated PS	14	183
4066668	Drumlins Integrated PS	*	61
4066682	Rowandale Integrated PS	0	18
4610063	Regent House School Prep. Dept.	0	132
4610085	Down High School Prep. Dept.	0	128
4610097	Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept.	*	76
4620015	Bangor Grammar School Prep. Dept.	0	137
4620044	Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept.	0	184
4620050	Friends School Prep. Dept.	*	145
4620051	Wallace High School Prep. Dept.	0	146

Note:

- 1 Free school meal entitlement for nursery class pupils measured as those children who have a parent in receipt of Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance or who are recorded as entitled to free school meals.
 - 2 Includes pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 - year 7 classes where applicable.
- * relates to less than 5 cases.

NUMBER OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA BY POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL, 2007/08

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4210012	Movilla High School	130	593
4210029	The High School Ballynahinch	48	375

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4210030	Lisnasharragh High School	36	69
4210031	Donaghadee High School	47	213
4210045	Comber High School	92	387
4210046	Glastry College	94	624
4210051	Lisnagarvey High School	114	280
4210063	Saintfield High School	20	348
4210086	Knockbreda High School	162	574
4210183	Newtownbreda High School	153	707
4210194	Dunmurry High School	120	310
4210201	Laurelhill Community College	140	934
4210262	Dundonald High School	133	332
4210296	Bangor Academy And 6th Form College	214	1289
4230023	St Mary's High School	131	533
4230067	St Columba's High School	44	271
4230102	St Colmcille's High School	62	451
4230107	St Columbanus' College	86	545
4230161	St Colman's High School	84	294
4230165	St Patrick's High School	85	320
4230211	St Malachy's High School	264	1022
4230223	St Colm's High School	421	692
4230224	De La Salle Secondary School	108	341
4250024	Priory College	99	423
4250072	Fort Hill College	137	869
4250272	Down Academy	80	240
4260255	Lagan College	156	1200

DENI Ref	School Name	No. of pupils entitled to free school meals	Total enrolment
4260281	Shimna Integrated College	76	510
4260295	Strangford Integrated College	53	503
4410063	Regent House School	40	1413
4410085	Down High School	20	941
4410097	Glenlola Collegiate	30	1073
4420015	Bangor Gs	30	894
4420044	Sullivan Upper School	12	1061
4420050	Friends' School	16	976
4420051	Wallace High School	26	1158
4420086	Assumption Gs	48	909
4420088	St Patrick's Gs	45	710
4420259	Our Lady And St Patrick's College	18	1250

Source: NI school census

Creative Youth Partnerships

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Education to detail how her Department, working in close partnership with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, plans to build on the work of Creative Youth Partnerships.

(AQO 3550/08)

The Minister of Education: Fuair an chéim trialach de CYP, ó Aibreán dhá mhíle a ceathair go Márta dhá mhíle a seacht, measúnú deimhneach ón Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna.

The initial pilot phase of CYP, from April 2004 to March 2007, received a positive evaluation from the Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI). On this basis, additional funding has been made available by all the partner organisations, including my Department, to enable the programme to continue in 2007/2008 and also in 2008/2009.

More generally, my Department also supports the embedding of creativity across education, for example, in school leadership and management, in raising standards and in teaching and learning, where Being Creative is now one of the skills to be developed on a statutory basis across the revised curriculum. Schools also now have more flexibility to take creative approaches to the development and delivery of their curriculum.

Now that the pilot phase of CYP has ended, my Department has asked the CYP Steering Group to bring forward a strategy to the Department and to DCAL by June, setting out how CYP might be mainstreamed. My officials will liaise closely with DCAL counterparts in considering the proposed strategy. My Department will ensure that the strategy adheres to our equality duties.

School Capital Building Schemes

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education to detail the average time from the initial proposal to the completion of a capital scheme. (AQO 3546/08)

The Minister of Education: Caithfidh gach mórscéim tógála caipitil staidéar féidearthachta a bheith aici, caithfidh sí breithmheas eacnamaíochta atá ceadaithe ag an Roinn a fháil, agus caithfidh cistiú caipitil a bheith dáilte uirthi sular féidir léi dul go dtí an chéim deartha nó an chéim pleanála.

All major school capital building schemes must have a feasibility study, have an Economic Appraisal approved by the department and capital funding allocated before they can proceed to the design / planning stages.

Progress on any scheme can be affected by a number of factors, including the size and complexity of a scheme, whether or not a new site is required the need to satisfy Planning Service and Roads Service requirements, and issues arising from design development.

Once funding has been approved, the process of designing and obtaining statutory and other approvals can on average take some 18-24 months for a primary school, with a further 12-24 months construction period. For post-primary schools, which by nature are generally much larger and more complex, the design development process can typically take some 24-30 months, followed by an average construction period of 24-36 months.

With the introduction of the new Major Works Framework my Department is rising to the challenge of shortening these timescales. It is anticipated that this Framework will prove to be the vehicle for getting projects on the ground more quickly and efficiently, as this approach streamlines the procurement process.

Independent Admission Exams

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education to confirm if she will remove all funding and support from any school which attempts to establish a breakaway admissions process. (AQO 3569/08)

The Minister of Education: Dúirt mé go soiléir nach bhfuil aon dualgas ar an Roinn aon mhaoiniú nó cabhair a chur ar fáil do scoileanna le cuidiú leo scrúduithe iontrála a riartar go neamhspleách a fheidhmiú.

I have made clear that there is no obligation on the Department to provide any funding or assistance to help schools operate independently administered entrance examinations. Schools pursuing independent procedures for academic selection in a context of un-regulation will continue to receive their core funding allocation as determined by the common funding formula.

Primary School Funding

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Education for her assessment as to whether primary schools are adequately funded. (AQO 3495/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi na socruithe do mhaoiniú coiteann do bhainistíocht áitiúil scoileanna, faigheann gach scoil a fhaigheann deontas -- náischoileanna, bunscoileanna agus iarbhunscoileanna -- maoiniú tarmilgthe de réir a riachtanais choibhneasta.

Under LMS Common Funding arrangements, all grant-aided schools at all phases; nursery, primary and post-primary, receive delegated funding according to their relative need.

I recognise the importance of adequate support to ensure that our children get the best start to their school years. I have taken on board the views of primary schools and others during the recent consultation on LMS funding issues, and responded to those concerns by making provision for an increase in the primary pupil weighting from 1.02 to 1.04 in 2008-09 with a view to increasing progressively the relative funding levels distributed to primary schools under the LMS funding arrangements.

Within the £20.4m uplift to schools budgets for 2008/09 compared to 2007/08, some £12.67m was directed to primary schools, representing an overall cash uplift of over 3% and over 4% per pupil. For 2008/09, the average per pupil increase for primary schools of £102 per pupil (4%) is higher than the average per pupil increase for post-primary schools.

Significant resources are also being made available to primary schools, outside the current formula funding arrangements, including an additional £32 million over the next three years, to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum and a further £12 million to help primary school teaching principals.

I recognise that Primary Principals would wish to see more rapid progress to reflect the importance of primary learning in the balance of funding distributed across all schools. However, changes to the overall funding shares for primary schools have to be balanced, to avoid impacting adversely on pupils at other phases of education.

Independent Admission Exams

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to explain her meaning in reference to her comments that unregulation is a prospect fraught with administrative and litigious peril. (AQO 3564/08)

The Minister of Education: Má bhíonn neamh-rialachán ann i ndiaidh Aistriú 2009, dúirt roinnt scoileanna gramadaí go bhfuil rún acu scrúduithe iontrála a thabhairt isteach.

In the event of unregulation in school admissions after Transfer 2009, some grammar schools have indicated an intention to introduce entrance tests. I have described this as a proposal fraught with administrative peril for the following reason.

The Transfer Test is developed and operated by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in a context of high levels of pressure and challenge. CCEA ensure that each year's Transfer Tests are subject to a rigorous process of development and trialling. CCEA are able to draw upon a considerable range of expertise and experience to ensure the production and operation of a robust and secure testing mechanism in accordance with a very demanding specification. This is reflected in the fact that whilst there are each year roughly 1100 requests for a re-grade (approximately 15,000 sit the test), only a handful of marks have actually been re-graded in the last 5 years and there has been an absence of legal challenge to this process.

Additionally any entrance test needs to be supported by a procedure such as the Special Circumstances Procedure to ensure that the system is fair and allows for those whose performance at the test is affected by special circumstances. The current Special Circumstances Procedure that accompanies the Transfer Test is engaged by approximately 1400 applicants each year. It allows Boards of Governors to reconsider the Transfer Test grade of applicants in the light of documentary evidence of special circumstances and educational evidence demonstrating the typical educational performance of the applicant. Under the current Special Circumstances procedure up-grades are arrived at in a robust and standardised manner because the context is an established assessment procedure.

In general, admissions decisions based on selective procedures must be robust. The introduction of entrance tests requires also the introduction of a range of rigorous and transparently consistent procedures that can only be resource-intensive in the face of considerable pressure and are significantly more difficult to deliver in an unstandardised and non-centralised system.

The proposals which I brought before the Executive on 15 May 2008 and the Education Committee on 16 May 2008 offer a way forward which averts such risks, with a transitional assessment designed by an organisation which has developed considerable expertise in this area.

Drumragh Integrated College

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail how her Department is assisting Drumragh Integrated College to meet the demand for integrated post-primary education in the Omagh area.

(AQO 3556/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá tógáil scoile nua le go mbeidh áiseanna úrnua ar fáil do Choláiste Imeasctha Dhroim Ratha faoi lánseoil.

Construction of a new school building to provide purpose built modern facilities for Drumragh Integrated College is currently well underway. The new school will cater for a Long Term Enrolment of 580 pupils and it is anticipated that the construction of the new school will be completed in the Spring of 2009.

Extended Schools Programme

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Education to outline the steps she has taken to secure maximum funding for the extended schools programme.

(AQO 3563/08)

The Minister of Education: Ag tús an Bhuiséid cuireadh in iúl do na ranna uile dá mba mhaith leo coinneáil leo ag maoinú clár/gníomhartha a maoiníodh faoin phacáiste maoinithe do pháistí agus daoine óga, gurbh éigean iad a phríomh-sruthú ó leithroinntí rannacha

At the start of the Budget Process it was made clear to all departments that if they wanted to continue to fund programmes / activities which had previously been funded under the children and young people funding package, that they would have to be mainstreamed from within departmental allocations.

It became clear very early on that the overall level of resources agreed by the Executive for education would not allow me to fund all of these valuable

activities at the same level as had been the case in the previous two years.

Whilst I regard all aspects of this programme as important and valuable, I had to consider the scope for continuing it against a range of competing priorities.

In doing so I have ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYP package was mainstreamed within schools delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets.

I also ensured that provision for direct payments to special schools (funded outside of the CFF) was also continued.

In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes within CYP, and counselling services in schools.

As you know a key element of this programme which has been very successful and welcomed by schools and local communities is the extended schools programme. While I wanted to continue to fund this at existing levels, the resources available to me meant that I simply was not able to do this. Even after skewing resources away from other areas into Extended schools I have only been able to continue that element of the programme at 60% of the level of available to schools over the last two years.

This means a massive cut of 40% of a programme that is directed at our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.

As I have said I simply did not have resources to do any more than this.

This is not something which has only emerged now, it is something of which I was aware and concerned about from the outset of the whole Budget process.

It was for this reason that I raised it with the Finance Minister, the Junior Ministers and indeed the First Minister and Deputy First Minister consistently in ongoing correspondence over the whole of the budget period from last September through January this year and I am continuing to do so.

In summary the correspondence includes the following:-

Date	Brief Summary
20th September	Meeting with Finance Minister to discuss the implications of the indicative budget allocations.

Date	Brief Summary
28th September 2007	Letter to Finance Minister as follow-up to meeting on 20th September. Outlined key issues for Education in relation to indicative budget allocations. Specifically highlighted difficult position regarding CYP and the negative impact it would have on schools and other groups is the extended schools programmes were to stop. Highlights expectation that when CYP funding was allocated to the Department it was to be mainstreamed.
5th October 2007	Letter to Finance Minister following receipt of Draft Budget. Registers 'most strongly' concerns about the draft Budget proposals, particularly in years 1 and 2. Highlights that the Department does not have the resources in years 1 and 2 to cover the cost of the CYP.
8th October 2007	Letter to First Minister and Deputy First Minister and Finance Minister. Highlights concerns about the future of the CYP Programme. States the Department does not have the funding available to continue with key elements of the CYP Programme. Indicates that activities funded under the CYP are targeted towards the concept of extended schools. Indicates that some 491 schools which have benefited from extended schools funding would have this funding stopped.
19th October 2007	Letter to Finance Minister to provide an up-date on further analysis carried out. Highlights that the area of CYP is one where the proposed allocations will have a significant adverse impact. Raises the point that all CYP funding was removed from the Department's baseline despite the understanding that this funding was to be mainstreamed.
22nd October 2007	Letter to Finance Minister following receipt of a Executive paper on the Draft Budget. Indicates that additional resources made available will enable the continuation of some projects under the CYP programme but that the reduced allocation in years 1 and 2 would make it necessary to consider cuts in this area.
14th December 2007	Letter to First Minister and Deputy First Minister responding on the extent to which the Department would be able to mainstream provision under the CYP funding package. Highlights the shortfall in allocations required to mainstream CYP funding.

Date	Brief Summary
7th January 2008	Letter to the Finance Minister following completion of the public consultation on the draft Budget. Highlights concerns raised during the consultation in relation to the removal of funding for the CYP package. Highlights the shortfall in funding for CYP projects and indicates that this is 'simply too big'.
11th January 2008	Letter to Finance Minister following notification of a No Day Named Motion – All Party Group on Children and Young People. Letter highlights implications of reduced levels of CYP funding and that Department will not be able to continue with the programmes. Highlights that CYP package funding was introduced on the basis that the funding was a baseline allocation and not a short term measure.
17th January 2008	Letter to Finance Minister highlighting that the proposed Budget settlement leaves limited scope to make improvements needed in the areas of primary school funding and early years.
17th April 2008	Letter to the 2 Junior Ministers and the Finance Minister highlighting the negative impact the reduced level of funding would have on the extended schools programme. Requests that further funding is made available for the programme.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources to restore this important programme.

Falling Pupil Numbers

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Education to detail the actions being taken to address falling pupil numbers within the maintained, integrated and controlled education sectors. (AQO 3476/08)

The Minister of Education: Agus í ag pleanáil mórsceimeanna caipitil do scoileanna nua athsholáthair nó scoileanna cónasctha, déanann mo Roinn, i gcomhar lena comhpháirtithe oideachais, athbhreithniú bliantúil ar rollú fad-téarmach na scoile le linn an phróiseas pleanála le inmharthanacht agus inbhuaine an tsoláthair nua a chinntiú sa todhchaí.

In planning major capital schemes for new replacement schools or amalgamated schools my Department, in liaison with its educational partners, undertakes an annual review of the school's long-term enrolment during the planning process to ensure the future viability and sustainability of the new provision.

In addition, the Education and Library Boards and the CCMS continue to review the level of provision within their respective remits taking account of demographic decline and population migration. While the Department does not have a policy to close schools

with low enrolments and each individual case is considered on its merits, these reviews have resulted in school closures and rationalisations where existing provision has shown to be unsustainable.

Independent Admission Exams

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education to detail the rights of schools in each sector to set their own admissions criteria in the absence of an agreed way forward on post primary transfer. (AQO 3507/08)

The Minister of Education: Bheadh scrúduithe iontrála a riartar go neamhspleách ann dá mbeadh an t-aistriú iarbhunscoile sa bhliain dhá mhíle a deich agus thairis sin gan rialachán. D'fhéach mé le socruithe nua aistrithe a fhorbairt a thig leo an tacaíocht riachtanach a bheith acu le gur féidir leo bheith faoi rialacháin

Independently administered entrance examinations are only a prospect if post-primary transfer, in 2010 and beyond, is to be unregulated. I have sought to develop new transfer arrangements capable of attracting the necessary support to be governed by regulations. If regulations can be agreed then these regulations will define what schools can and cannot do across all sectors. If agreement is not forthcoming, then whilst schools will still be required to publish criteria and apply their published criteria (and remain within their admissions number), it will be legally permissible for them to set the admissions criteria they choose.

I have highlighted on a number of occasions the administrative and litigious perils associated with an independently administered entrance examination, and you will be aware that I brought before the Executive, on 15 May 2008, my proposals for new transfer arrangements which will allow all schools the opportunity to offer excellence in both academic and vocational pathways, but without the need for a pressurised and inequitable testing regime. These proposals merit serious consideration, and it is in the interests of all concerned that a regulated system of transfer is put in place for 2010 and beyond.

Education Workforce

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the progress of the review into the education workforce. (AQO 3565/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuaigh mo Roinn i gcomhairle leis na páirtithe leasmhara tábhachtacha ar théarmaí tagartha beartaithe maidir le hathbhreithniú ar fhórsa saothair na scoileanna agus chríochnaigh sí anailís ar na freagraí a fuarthas

My Department has consulted with key stakeholders on proposed terms of reference for a review of the school workforce and completed an analysis of the responses received. Final terms of reference are now being drawn up, taking account of stakeholders' comments, and I will make an announcement shortly.

Behavioural Problems in Schools

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education if the number of incidents of persistent behavioural problems amongst pupils in primary and secondary level schools has increased in the last five years and what procedures are in place to deal with the issue.

(AQO 3553/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl de eolas ag an Roinn faoi mhí-iompar i measc daltaí i scoileanna ach an t-eolas sin atá bunaithe ar fhógraí fionraithe agus díbeartha a chuireann na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlinne ar fáil

The only information which the Department currently has about incidents of behavioural problems amongst pupils in schools is based on the annual

notifications of suspensions and expulsions provided by the Education and Library Boards.

These statistics would suggest a reduction in the number of incidents both in the primary and secondary sectors. For example, in the 2004/05 school year there were 313 suspensions in primary and 5,101 in post-primary schools. In the 2006/07 school year there were 235 from primary and 4,746 from post-primary. The same pattern of reduction is present in the figures for expulsions.

Depending on the severity of the behaviour, a school can deal with the incident within its own Discipline Policy or, should the seriousness of the behaviour warrant it, seek support from the Education and Library Boards' pupil support services.

Primary and Post-Primary School Figures

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attended (i) integrated primary; and (ii) integrated post-primary schools, in each academic year since 1997-98.

(AQW 7228/08)

The Minister of Education: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

PRIMARY¹ AND POST-PRIMARY PUPILS ENROLLED IN INTEGRATED² EDUCATION 1997/98 – 2007/08

Year	Primary			Post-primary		
	Enrolment at integrated schools	Enrolment at all schools	% enrolled at integrated schools	Enrolment at integrated schools	Enrolment at all schools	% enrolled at integrated schools
1997/98	3,846	187,844	2.05	4,308	153,094	2.81
1998/99	4,705	184,903	2.54	6,677	153,994	4.34
1999/00	5,075	181,979	2.79	7,691	154,964	4.96
2000/01	5,452	180,447	3.02	8,688	155,553	5.59
2001/02	5,733	179,039	3.20	9,247	155,503	5.95
2002/03	5,935	176,802	3.36	9,760	155,747	6.27
2003/04	6,417	174,167	3.68	10,077	155,394	6.48
2004/05	6,798	171,998	3.95	10,299	153,449	6.71
2005/06	7,045	169,946	4.15	10,513	151,840	6.92
2006/07	7,291	168,184	4.34	10,726	149,765	7.16
2007/08	7,620	166,639	4.57	11,247	147,942	7.60

Source: NI school census

Note 1: Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Note 2: Integrated education includes controlled and grant maintained integrated

Primary School Figures

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of the overall school population attended (i) integrated primary; and (ii) integrated post-primary schools, in each academic year from 1997-98. (AQW 7231/08)

The Minister of Education: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

PRIMARY¹ AND POST-PRIMARY PUPILS ENROLLED IN INTEGRATED² EDUCATION 1997/98 – 2007/08

Year	Primary			Post-primary		
	Enrolment at integrated schools	Enrolment at all schools	% enrolled at integrated schools	Enrolment at integrated schools	Enrolment at all schools	% enrolled at integrated schools
1997/98	3,846	187,844	2.05	4,308	153,094	2.81
1998/99	4,705	184,903	2.54	6,677	153,994	4.34
1999/00	5,075	181,979	2.79	7,691	154,964	4.96
2000/01	5,452	180,447	3.02	8,688	155,553	5.59
2001/02	5,733	179,039	3.20	9,247	155,503	5.95
2002/03	5,935	176,802	3.36	9,760	155,747	6.27
2003/04	6,417	174,167	3.68	10,077	155,394	6.48
2004/05	6,798	171,998	3.95	10,299	153,449	6.71
2005/06	7,045	169,946	4.15	10,513	151,840	6.92
2006/07	7,291	168,184	4.34	10,726	149,765	7.16
2007/08	7,620	166,639	4.57	11,247	147,942	7.60

Source: NI school census

Note 1: Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Note 2: Integrated education includes controlled and grant maintained integrated

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

English as a Foreign Language Courses

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of teaching English as a foreign language, teaching English to speakers of other languages and related courses that are provided by further and higher education colleges in each of the last five years. (AQW 5494/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The number of courses and enrolments relating to English as a foreign language, that are provided by further and higher education colleges in each of the last five years are detailed below:

Academic Year	Number of Courses	Total Enrolments
2002/03	25	1583
2003/04	84	1991

Academic Year	Number of Courses	Total Enrolments
2004/05	211	4579
2005/06	385	8032
2006/07	360	8532

Source: Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by his department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) he is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6209/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I have flown business class seven times in my capacity as Minister, at a total cost of £9,303.70.

I have travelled in both economy and business class on Ministerial business. However, where available, it is standard practice to fly business class, particularly on long-haul journeys.

Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the capital cost of the University of Ulster Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine; (ii) when the park was constructed; and (iii) the number of (a) biosciences; and (b) pharmaceutical, jobs created there. (AQW 6838/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The University of Ulster has not created a Biotechnology Science Park but instead operates a Science Innovation Centre which was opened in September 2001 and is located within the Science Research Park at the Coleraine Campus.

The Centre supports all types of innovation activities and is not restricted to biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. Its purpose is to provide start up businesses with full incubation opportunities and inward investment companies with the opportunity to set up an initial base of operations before moving to Science Research Park accommodation or outside of the university campus.

Since 2001, the university advise that over 25 companies have used the facility and estimate that 70 jobs have been created, contributing in excess of £1.5m to the local economy. Of these companies, three would be deemed as bioscience and pharmaceutical with ten jobs created. The Science Innovation Centre cost £2.3m to construct.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services his department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6866/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In the last four years my Department awarded the following consultancy contracts which did not have to go out to public tender:-

Year	No of Contracts	Description	Value	To whom awarded
04/05	4	EQIA for Tribunal Rules of Procedure Phase 2	£1,375	EPEC

Year	No of Contracts	Description	Value	To whom awarded
		RIA for Tribunal Rules of Procedures Phase 2	£1,375	EPEC
		Integrated Impact Assessment for EMPO 2005	£1,920	EPEC
		Implementation of the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland	£36,900	Office of Government Consultancy (OGC)
05/06	1	Adria work	£19,000	Peer Consulting
06/07	1	Run down and closure of Enterprise Ulster	£5,000	Malcolm Haigh
07/08	2	To facilitate consultation on DEL Corporate Plan	£980	Sandra Janoff
		Review of Third Party Relationships in North West Institute	£30,000	KPMG

University of Ulster Computer Training Officers

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to make a statement on the ongoing review by the University of Ulster of the number of computer training officers. (AQW 6891/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The University advises that its Faculty of Computing and Engineering is currently reviewing its course provision across all of its campuses. As part of that process, it is reviewing its staffing complement and this includes a review of computer training officer posts on the various campuses.

This work is at an early stage and it is envisaged that the review, and any actions arising from it, will be completed by 31 December 2008.

South Eastern Regional College

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time, courses available at the Ards campus of the South Eastern Regional College; and to detail the number of such courses that will be available for the new September semester. (AQO 3482/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: South Eastern Regional College (SERC) has stated that there are currently 55 full-time courses and 131 part-time courses provided at the Ards Campus.

In the 2008/09 academic year, the college has indicated that it will increase course provision at the Ards Campus to 81 full-time and 133 part-time courses.

Pre-Enterprise Initiatives

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his plans to support pre-enterprise initiatives. (AQO 3481/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Encouraging an entrepreneurial culture, and providing the skills needed to support innovation and enterprise are important elements in delivering Government's wider economic vision for Northern Ireland. While other Departments and organisations are in the lead in this area, my Department has an important contribution to make especially through further and higher education.

The Department is working with the six area-based Further Education colleges and the Workforce Development Forums to determine how best they can support business and industry. Developing enterprise awareness and encouraging entrepreneurship amongst the students will be a key part of this. For example, the curriculum provided to 16 to 19 year olds will include a component on enterprise and an understanding of how business operates.

More specifically, all colleges will continue to make available the Certificate of Business Enterprise. This course was developed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) at the request of the Department. It enables students to develop knowledge, skills and understanding, as well as the motivation and confidence, to establish their own small businesses.

The Further Education sector's renewed emphasis on economic development requires engagement and collaboration between Colleges and local businesses, not just in the teaching of skills but also in support of innovation, productivity and product design and development and there is very good practice across the sector.

The Further Education sector will also continue to explore with Invest NI how it might better support enterprise through the introduction of college based "Points of Presence" to offer information and advice to those considering starting a business.

In Higher Education a particular example of Best Practice is through the Northern Ireland Centre for Entrepreneurship (NICENT). This project, funded

by Invest NI, enables our two Universities to embed entrepreneurship and started with science, engineering and technology but has now moved to other faculties.

Former Employees from Manufacturing Sector

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what skills-based approach is being taken to assist former employees in the manufacturing sector to obtain gainful employment in other areas of expertise. (AQO 3527/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department provides assistance to former employees, including those from the manufacturing sector, seeking employment in other sectors through a range of programmes and services. Individuals are provided with information, advice and guidance regarding employment opportunities, careers, further education and training/re-training. Individuals who are unemployed can retrain through programmes including New Deal or Bridge to Employment.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail why a school has the discretionary power to withhold a full week's payment of Education Maintenance Allowance in cases where only 2-3 days have been taken off. (AQO 3533/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has responsibility through the Further Education colleges for the Education Maintenance Allowance. In order to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance, in any week, students are required to attend all learning sessions for their programme of study. However, if they are unable to attend all sessions they may still be eligible for payment if the absence is authorised by the Learning Centre. Under the Department's guidelines to Learning Centres, where an absence is not authorised the Learning Centre cannot approve any payment for that week.

If you require information in respect of a specific school I advise contacting the Minister for Education.

Merger of Stranmillis College with Queen's University Belfast

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the discussions his officials had with Stranmillis College in relation to its merger with Queen's University, Belfast, before the announcement. (AQO 3523/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As you would expect my Department has regular discussions with Stranmillis University College about a range of issues on an ongoing basis. A formal meeting was held before Christmas between the Department and representatives of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College about potential options for the future of the College, based on the outworkings of the Taylor Report.

Pathways to Work Programme

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the percentage of people who have secured meaningful employment through their participation in the Pathways to Work Programme. (AQO 3530/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: An interim evaluation of the Pathways to Work Programme is currently underway. Available information suggests that almost 1,500 people or 11.24% of those who have engaged with the programme have secured employment since it began as a pilot in October 2005.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail why the guidelines for withholding Education Maintenance Allowance in relation to absent days is left to the discretion of schools. (AQO 3532/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has responsibility through the Further Education Colleges for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The Department has issued comprehensive guidance to all Learning Centres on the administration of the Education Maintenance Allowance including reporting and monitoring of attendance, and authorising absence. Where a student is absent, it is for the Learning Centre to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised in accordance with this guidance.

Where an absence is authorised, students are entitled to receive the EMA payment in the same way as if they had attended, assuming there are no unauthorised absences in that week. Where an absence is not authorised, the Learning Centre cannot approve any payment for that week.

If you require information in respect of a specific school I advise contacting the Minister for Education.

Training for Success Programme

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if there are any plans for students' training expenses on placement to be offset through the introduction of a practical training supplement. (AQO 3480/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Under Training for Success, participants are only on work placement under the Job-Ready strand of the provision.

It is the responsibility of Suppliers to ensure that participants are provided with the necessary safety equipment appropriate to the work placement and the working environment.

The Department also funds, where appropriate, childcare payments, lodging allowances, and participant bonuses. The Department also funds participants' travel costs.

I would consider, therefore, that all reasonable training expenses are being addressed by the Department under present arrangements and I have no plans to change these.

St Mary's University College

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail the funding package being proposed in relation to St. Mary's University College; (ii) if the proposal puts the future viability of the college in doubt; (iii) if can confirm the college has one of the best records of attracting students from lower economic backgrounds; and (iv) if he is committed to a funding proposal to ensure the long-term future of the college. (AQO 3526/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A new funding model is being developed for Academic Year 2008-09 which reflects more appropriately the actual student numbers at St. Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges. Once the total funding available has been determined, I will examine transitional funding for both institutions for the next Academic Year. This will allow time for St. Mary's to develop proposals for its viability. The college has a good record in attracting students from lower economic backgrounds with its Performance Indicators showing a rate slightly above the Northern Ireland average. I am committed to ensuring a fit for purpose funding model which responds to student numbers and to working with the College and other stakeholders around potential options for the long term viability of St. Mary's.

Training for Success Programme

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the monitoring his Department conducts on the wage levels paid to Training for Success trainees; and to consider making payment of training allowances conditional on minimum wage levels being paid by employers. (AQO 3478/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Under Training for Success, participants who are undertaking an apprenticeship with an employer receive wages. The Department's guidelines currently state that apprentices ought to be paid the appropriate rate for the job in line with National Minimum Wage Regulations. The Department does not, however, monitor the wages that employers pay their employees.

Under its current review of Training for Success, I can confirm that the Department is examining the potential for setting a minimum wage requirement for apprentices as a condition of funding paid to employers and suppliers for training provision.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Business Class Flights

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, since taking up office in May 2007, (i) the number of occasions that he has flown business class in his capacity as Minister; and (ii) the cost incurred by his department; and to confirm if (a) it is standard practice to fly business class; and (b) he is given the choice to fly economy class. (AQW 6207/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): Since 8 May 2007, I have flown on 5 long-haul journeys (4 to USA, 1 to India) by business class at a total cost of £20,604.38. I can confirm it is standard practice to fly business class on such journeys to facilitate working during and after the flight. I have used budget airlines for shorter trips to other parts of the United Kingdom and Europe.

Invest NI

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each parliamentary constituency annually between 1998 and 2007 inclusive, (i) the total number of assistance offers; (ii) the total amount of financial assistance actually provided; (iii) the final amount of overall investment

actually secured; and (iv) the number of new jobs created, attributable to Invest NI or its legacy agencies, the Industrial Development Board and Local Enterprise Development Unit. (AQW 6561/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I will address each part of your question in the order requested.

- (i) The total number of offers of assistance during the period in question was 19,315.

Table 1 provides the number of offers made by Invest NI to clients within the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Constituency Areas.

- (ii) Information on the financial assistance actually provided is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
- (iii) Again, this information is not available and retrieving it would involve disproportionate costs.
- (iv) In relation to the measurement of those jobs actually created, Invest NI does not currently have a comprehensive dataset spanning the period requested, which pre-dates the creation of the agency by four years.

Invest NI is currently engaged in a research project with the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) that will produce information on the extent of job creation of its clients by sub-regional areas within Northern Ireland, including Parliamentary Constituency Areas. This work involves the construction of a unique firm-level dataset linking the Census of Employment and the Invest NI Client Management System. The analysis is complex necessitating the creation of a new variable relating to the entry, exit, survival and growth of individual businesses.

While work on job creation analyses continues, jobs promotion data is available in relation to inward investment successes, both first-time investment and reinvestments, and for those locally-owned business start-ups assisted through the Start a Business Programme. Tables 2(a) and (b) describe the number of jobs promoted through first-time inward investment projects, the number of jobs promoted through reinvestment projects by externally-owned clients, and the number of jobs estimated as a result of Start a Business Programme activity respectively.

Apart from the Start a Business Programme, Invest NI does not record jobs promoted from its locally-owned client base. Rather its primary focus is to contribute to improving Northern Ireland's manufacturing and private services productivity. It measures growth in sales and exports, securing additional wages and salaries and increasing the level of expenditure on research and development. These are more appropriate for locally-owned companies

as improvements in these measures are an indication of higher levels of business competitiveness; which in turn will lead to greater wealth creation and better employment opportunities.

Invest NI

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each parliamentary constituency annually between 1998 and 2007 inclusive, (i) the total number of new jobs created; and (ii) the total number of jobs lost, by client companies of Invest NI or its legacy agencies, the Industrial Development Board and Local Enterprise Development Unit. (AQW 6562/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In relation to the measurement of those jobs actually created, Invest NI does not have a comprehensive dataset spanning the period requested and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Invest NI is currently engaged in a research project with the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) that will produce information on the extent of job creation of its clients by sub-regional areas within Northern Ireland, including Parliamentary Constituency Areas. This work involves the construction of a unique firm-level dataset linking the Census of Employment and the Invest NI Client Management System. The analysis is complex, necessitating the creation of a new variable relating to the entry, exit, survival and growth of individual businesses.

Apart from the Start a Business Programme, Invest NI does not record jobs promoted from its locally-owned client base. Rather, its primary focus is to contribute to improving Northern Ireland's manufacturing and private services productivity. It measures growth in sales and exports, securing additional wages and salaries and increasing the level of expenditure on research and development. These are more appropriate for locally-owned companies as improvements in these measures are an indication of higher levels of business competitiveness; which in turn will lead to greater wealth creation and better employment opportunities.

Invest NI

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each parliamentary constituency annually between 1998 and 2007 inclusive, (i) the total number of first-time inward investment projects located; and (ii) the total number of new jobs created, broken down by (a) Foreign

Direct investors; and (b) other investors, which received assistance offers from Invest NI or its legacy agencies, the Industrial Development Board and Local Enterprise Development Unit. (AQW 6565/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will address each part of your question in the order requested.

- (i) The total number of first-time inward investment projects located in each parliamentary constituency area in each of the years from 1998 to 2007 is shown in Table 1.
- (ii) In relation to the measurement of those jobs actually created, Invest NI does not have a comprehensive dataset spanning the period requested and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Invest NI is currently engaged in a research project with the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) that will produce information on the extent of job creation of its clients by sub-regional areas within Northern Ireland, including Parliamentary Constituency Areas. This involves the construction of a unique firm-level dataset linking the Census of Employment and the Invest NI Client Management System. The analysis is complex necessitating the creation of a new variable relating to the entry, exit, survival and growth of individual businesses.

While work on job creation analyses continues, jobs promotion data is available in relation to inward investment successes, both first-time investment and reinvestments, and for those locally-owned business start-ups assisted through the Start a Business Programme. Tables 2(a), (b) and (c) outlined below describe the number of jobs promoted through first-time inward investment projects, the number of jobs promoted through reinvestment projects by externally-owned clients, and the number of jobs estimated as a result of Start a Business Programme activity respectively.

Apart from the Start a Business Programme, Invest NI does not record jobs promoted from its locally-owned client base. Rather its primary focus is to contribute to improving Northern Ireland's manufacturing and private services productivity. It measures growth in sales and exports, securing additional wages and salaries and increasing the level of expenditure on research and development. These are more appropriate for locally-owned companies as improvements in these measures are an indication of higher levels of business competitiveness; which in turn will lead to greater wealth creation and better employment opportunities.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME INVEST NI INWARD INVESTMENT PROJECTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (1998/99-2006/07)

PCA	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
Belfast East	2	1	1	1			2	2	3	12
Belfast North	1	2	3	3		1	1	1	1	13
Belfast South	11	5	4	1	3	5	6	1	7	43
Belfast West	1		1		2	2	1	1		8
East Antrim	1	1	1		1	2	2	1		9
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		1	1		1				3	6
Foyle	1		3	1	1	2		1	3	12
Lagan Valley	2							1		3
Mid Ulster					1		3			4
Newry & Armagh			1		1			3	1	6
North Down		2		1			1			4
South Antrim		1		1						2
South Down	1			1						2
Strangford	1			1			1			3
Upper Bann								1		1
West Tyrone			1			1		3		5
Total	21	13	16	10	10	13	17	15	18	133

Notes:

- Figures relate to Invest NI clients only. There may also have been non-Invest NI clients investing in the area over the time period.
- 1998/99 to 2001/02 relates to IDB, 2002/03 to 2006/07 relates to Invest NI.
- Total offer locations exceed total number of offers, as some projects are located in more than one area.

TABLE 2 (A): NEW JOBS PROMOTED BY FIRST-TIME INVEST NI INWARD INVESTMENT PROJECTS (1998/99 -2006/07)

PCA	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
Belfast East	1,099	14	40	20			405	208	409	2,195
Belfast North	250	192	1,476	375		14	27	46	44	2,424
Belfast South	657	1,673	392	45	216	286	478	100	901	4,748
Belfast West	75		250		35	72	750	120		1,302
East Antrim	71	130	220		100	67	112	35		735
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		130	20		350				141	641
Foyle	150		357	124	50	485		16	754	1,936
Lagan Valley	147							71		218
Mid Ulster					16		38			54
Newry & Armagh			300		50			1,002	304	1,656
North Down		325		18			76			419
South Antrim		84		93						177
South Down	195			70						265
Strangford	13			15			19			47
Upper Bann								49		49

PCA	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
West Tyrone			30			175		109		314
Total	2,657	2,548	3,085	760	817	1,099	1,905	1,756	2,553	17,180

Notes:

- Figures relate to Invest NI clients only. There may also have been non-Invest NI clients investing in the area over the time period.
- 1998/99 to 2001/02 relates to IDB, 2002/03 to 2006/07 relates to Invest NI.
- Jobs promoted represents the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

TABLE 2 (B): NEW JOBS PROMOTED BY REINVESTMENT PROJECTS FROM EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS (1998/99 -2006/07)

Pca	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
Belfast East	50	1,296		122			5	24	215	1,712
Belfast North		97		300		149				546
Belfast South	331	247	203			363	901	575	86	2,706
Belfast West		314		215						529
East Antrim	150	461	2,143	76				155		2,985
East Londonderry	77	123	26			24				250
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		106		108		202		11	300	727
Foyle	8	960		396	43	1	40	345		1,793
Lagan Valley	365	32		40			16			453
Mid Ulster					16		128	40		184
Newry & Armagh					25					25
North Antrim			12				23			35
North Down		33			41	200	64		233	571
South Antrim	86	142		223	5		319	67		842
South Down	80			64				127		271
Strangford	1	80			70	5			20	176
Upper Bann	202	145	37	72	16	110	13			595
West Tyrone	155			150			53		44	402
Total	1,505	4,036	2,421	1,766	216	1,054	1,562	1,344	898	14,802

Notes:

- Figures relate to Invest NI clients only. There may also have been non-Invest NI clients investing in the area over the time period.
- 1998/99 to 2001/02 relates to IDB, 2002/03 to 2006/07 relates to Invest NI.
- Jobs promoted represents the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

TABLE 2 (C) JOBS PROMOTED THROUGH START A BUSINESS PROGRAMME APPROVALS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (2002/03 -2006/07)

PCA	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
Belfast East	59	120	146	111	92	528
Belfast North	74	91	113	148	96	522
Belfast South	99	161	212	161	150	783
Belfast West	82	117	170	174	153	696
East Antrim	139	174	268	207	218	1006

PCA	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
East Londonderry	133	169	306	255	233	1096
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	187	276	434	380	390	1667
Foyle	165	260	459	325	287	1496
Lagan Valley	183	151	225	215	199	973
Mid Ulster	217	265	342	363	298	1485
Newry & Armagh	198	230	359	293	239	1319
North Antrim	140	137	255	234	265	1031
North Down	117	200	203	190	144	854
South Antrim	122	183	213	204	181	903
South Down	212	290	426	390	237	1555
Strangford	147	217	269	260	203	1096
Upper Bann	176	220	311	298	178	1183
West Tyrone	129	168	234	250	256	1037
Total	2,579	3,429	4,945	4,458	3,819	19,230

Note: The Start a Business Programme commenced in September 2001, therefore, 2002/03 represents the first full year of data for this programme.

Invest NI

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the identity of all client companies of Invest NI or its legacy agencies, the Industrial Development Board and Local Enterprise Development Unit in the Foyle parliamentary constituency annually between 1998 and 2007 inclusive, broken down by; (i) the number of assistance offers each client company received; (ii) the total amount of financial assistance actually provided to each client company; (iii) the final amount of overall investment actually secured in each instance; (iv) the number of new jobs created by each client company in each instance; and (v) the number of jobs lost by each client company. (AQW 6567/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will address each part of your question in the order requested.

- (i) The number of assistance offers made to client companies in the constituency is shown at Table 1.
- (ii) Information on the financial assistance actually provided is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
- (iii) Again, this information is not available and retrieving it would involve substantial disproportionate cost.
- (iv) & (v) In relation to the measurement of those jobs actually created, Invest NI does not have a comprehensive dataset spanning the period requested and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Invest NI is currently engaged in a research project with the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) that will produce information on the extent of job creation of its clients by sub-regional areas within Northern Ireland, including Parliamentary Constituency Areas. This involves the construction of a unique firm-level dataset linking the Census of Employment and the Invest NI Client Management System. The analysis is complex necessitating the creation of a new variable relating to the entry, exit, survival and growth of individual businesses.

Apart from the Start a Business Programme, Invest NI does not record jobs promoted from its locally-owned client base. Rather, its primary focus is to contribute to improving Northern Ireland's manufacturing and private services productivity. It measures growth in sales and exports, securing additional wages and salaries and increasing the level of expenditure on research and development. These are more appropriate for locally-owned companies as improvements in these measures are an indication of higher levels of business competitiveness; which in turn will lead to greater wealth creation and better employment opportunities.

It should be noted that areas such as Parliamentary Constituencies are not self-contained labour markets. A project assisted in a particular location has the potential to create benefits across a much wider area. Northern Ireland is a relatively small place and evidence indicates that many investments draw their workforce from areas beyond constituency and council area boundaries.

Invest NI has limited scope for 'directing' investment to specific geographic areas. Although we are able to influence the location decisions of some inward-investment projects, assistance patterns are demand-led by businesses wishing to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets. Most new inward investment, which is primarily service based, locate where skilled labour supply is more accessible. In the case of established businesses, reinvestment patterns will usually be determined by the existing location of the business.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI ACTIVITY IN FOYLE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (1998/99 – 2006/07)

Year	No of Offers	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m	Jobs Promoted - Inward Investment	Jobs Safeguarded - Inward Investment	Jobs Promoted - Start a Business Programme
1998/99	228	5.74	23.11	158	50	-
1999/00	229	7.75	28.76	960	0	-
2000/01	88	11.34	35.43	357	0	-
2001/02	69	5.23	20.92	520	0	-
2002/03	94	14.41	105.66	93	1,033	165
2003/04	232	7.59	27.31	486	0	260
2004/05	222	5.66	47.03	40	117	459
2005/06	159	27.03	104.91	361	1,258	325
2006/07	172	8.59	35.65	754	0	287
Total	1,493	93.34	428.77	3,729	2,458	1,496

Notes:

1. 1998/99 to 2001/02 relates to IDB, 2002/03 to 2006/07 relates to Invest NI.
2. Figures relate to Invest NI clients only. There may also have been non-Invest NI clients investing in the area over the time period.
3. Jobs promoted represents the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
4. Jobs safeguarded represents the number of jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.
5. Planned Investment includes Assistance Offered.
6. Number of Offers, Assistance Offered and Planned Investment includes Inward Investment projects.
7. The Start a Business Programme commenced in September 2001, therefore, 2002/03 represents the first full year of data for this programme.
8. Figures may not add due to rounding.

2012 Olympic Games

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the possible

impact of the 2012 Olympics on the local economy.

(AQW 6781/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is coordinating the implementation of the Northern Ireland 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Strategy which has been developed in consultation with other NI Departments and Agencies to ensure that NI maximises the opportunities that the 2012 Games present. In addition to the business contracts to be won, there is opportunity across, sport, volunteering, culture/arts, tourism, education and skills to make a positive impact on the local economy.

Based on recent estimates, delivery of the 2012 Olympic Games offers the prospect of circa £9bn in Games related contract opportunities for a wide range of goods and services. The organising bodies have responsibility for managing the delivery process which includes procurement of goods and services. Working in conjunction with the English Regional Development Agencies and the Devolved Administrations, they have developed the Competefor website for the publication of Games related contract opportunities.

In Northern Ireland, Invest NI has signed the Competefor contract and a regional NI launch was held on 8 April 2008. To date, some 240 companies have registered their details on the site (the annual target is at least 300 companies). Invest NI will be engaging in an active regional programme of Competefor launch events, publicity and advice to increase awareness of supply chain opportunities and to help companies become ready to bid for 2012 business. In addition, further research is being carried out into supply chain opportunities to help companies make contact with relevant procurement specialists.

According to research from VisitBritain and VisitLondon, tourism stands to benefit by an extra £2.1 billion. Most benefits will be seen post 2012, based on increased brand awareness of London and the UK. The two main goals, from a tourism perspective as a result of 2012, are to achieve a growth in visitor numbers and revenue (pre and post games) and increased positive press/PR coverage of Northern Ireland.

A NI Legacy Action Plan will be used positively to articulate the legacy that NI aims to achieve from its participation in the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games and how 2012 may be used as a milestone for other major events, such as the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, since the development of the Biotechnology Science Park at the University

of Ulster, Coleraine campus in 2001, the number of private sector (i) biotechnology; and (ii) pharmaceutical, jobs that have been created in the Coleraine area. (AQW 6839/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Life Sciences sector which includes the Bio-Science and Pharmaceutical sectors has been identified and targeted as a priority sector by Invest NI in helping to develop a sustainable knowledge based economy for Northern Ireland. This is in line with the Regional Innovation Strategy.

The Department of Employment and Learning has confirmed that the University of Ulster has not created a Biotechnology Science Park but instead operates a Science Innovation Centre which was opened in September 2001, at a construction cost of £2.3m, and is located within the Science Research Park at the Coleraine Campus.

This Centre supports all types of innovation activities and is not restricted to biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. Its purpose is to provide start up businesses with full incubation opportunities and inward investment companies with the opportunity to set up an initial base of operations. Since 2001, the University advises that over 25 companies have used the facility and estimate that 70 jobs have been created of which 10 would be deemed to be in the Life Sciences sector.

Invest NI has 4 key Life Sciences clients located in the Coleraine area that collectively employ approximately 100 staff, representing a growth of over 30 new jobs since 2001.

The cutting edge research capabilities of Northern Ireland's Life Sciences companies and the two local universities are recognised as key competitive strengths in growing this sector in the future. In order to build on this research capability Invest NI has provided funding for a number of centres of excellence including two centres in Life Sciences at the University of Ulster's Coleraine campus, a centre in Food and Health and a centre in Functional Genomics. Both centres are part of the Centre for Molecular Biosciences which is strategically located adjacent to the Science Research Park. In addition, Invest NI has also recently supported 3 Life Sciences projects at the Science Research Park through the pilot phase of its Proof of Concept Programme.

Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6334/08, what courses or research activities, at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster or at the North West Regional College provide the competencies

necessary to facilitate investment in pharmaceutical industries or bioscience. (AQW 6861/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: No activity in this area is offered at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster. The University of Ulster's School of Biomedical Sciences and Biomedical Research Institute is located at its Coleraine campus. It provides a wide range of courses in bio-science, including pharmaceutical science, and an extensive programme of research in these areas. The research has been rated by the UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise as 5*, the highest possible international standard.

The North West Regional College is not currently running any bioscience or pharmaceutical courses at a Higher Education level. However, the College has received Departmental approval to commence a Foundation Degree course in Applied and Medical Science in September 2008.

I am very aware of the scale of the challenge in building and maintaining a sustainable pipeline of skilled and qualified people - a factor that will be vital in the continued growth of our economy. This is particularly important given our current focus on attracting high-quality international investments and on helping our indigenous businesses to develop their potential to grow in international markets. This challenge will be addressed by Invest NI working proactively with the Department of Employment and Learning, to help tackle specific skills needs, by aligning qualifications with market demand and by increasing the number of collaborative networks involving both business and knowledge based institutions.

It is also important to note that the Life Sciences sector (which includes the pharmaceutical and bio-science industries) in Northern Ireland is already well placed to benefit from further strategic investment as it includes a number of companies operating on a global basis, two leading universities undertaking cutting edge research and a highly skilled workforce.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services his Department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6902/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The attachments provide the information requested in relation to 2004-05; 2005-06; and 2006-07 financial years. This information has been obtained from the

Department's input to the Annual Consultancy Return which is commissioned annually by DFP. This return seeks information on a number of areas in relation to consultancy over and above that requested in the Assembly Question.

Information in relation to 2007-08 is not readily available as the Annual Consultancy Return has not yet been commissioned. The requirements of this Annual Return may be subject to change, and the information requested in the Question could only be separately compiled at this time at disproportionate cost.

DETI & NDPBS 2004-05

Name of Consultant employed	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
DETI			
Centre for public policy and the regions - CPPR	R&D Tax Credits	1	21,766
Sam Butler	Drafting work on Economic Vision	1	750
Deloitte	Professional Advice	1	3,000
Alan Chambers Hallmark Quality Assurance LTD	Personnel Development ISO9001:2000	1	600
Regional Forecasts Limited	Comparative Analysis, Forecasts, Monitoring and Evaluation of the NI Economy	1	11,400
DETI	sub total	5	37,516
NDPB's			
McClure Waters	Internal audit	1	11,000
G Dawson	Research on Waste Management	1	500
Kinnegar Associates Ltd	Project management for new role re Water Reform	1	91,013
WA Partnership	Post primary material for education website	1	2,475
J Crothers	Education input for business portal of website	1	450
The Nerve Centre	Filming of DVD for young consumers competition	1	4,255

Name of Consultant employed	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
A Haughan	Develop resources for retailers on business portal of website	1	600
S Miskelly	Consumer Proficiency study	1	6,000
VSF	Articles written for Consumer Skills for All (CSFA) newsletter	1	240
K Mc Aleenan	Judge for Young Consumer Competition	1	100
H Kealey	Lesson plans for Consumer Education portal of website	1	250
Low Carbon Solutions	Independent assessment of Northern Ireland Electricity costs	1	1,200
Mott McDonald	Draft response to DfT consultation	1	1,000
P McGill	Writing report on Universal banking	1	4,200
JD Hender	Recruitment Assessment centres	1	4,659
Mediation Northern Ireland	Mediation Services	1	15,943
Ernst & Young	VAT Advice	1	22,000
M W Associates	Golf Strategy for Northern Ireland	1	20,000
Lawson McDonald	Review of EU Peace Programme	1	2,769
George Nixon	Independent Facilitation	1	800
George Nixon	Independent Facilitation	1	400
W. Askin M.I.H.T	Signage of Causeway Coastal Route (CCR)	1	59,917
Jim Tully, Gartner	Input to the Electronics Sector Team Strategy on the future direction of Electronics.	1	5,430
David Woodhead	Start Final Technical Review - ST202	1	2,109

Name of Consultant employed	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
David Woodhead	Start Further Technical Appraisal - ST250	1	650
David Woodhead	Start Tech Appraisal - ST250	1	1,550
Richard Jefery-Cook	EDRMS Consultancy	1	28,833
Deecal International Ltd	Procurement Card Implementation	1	14,850
Real Asset Management	Oracle ADI Asset Journal Interface	1	1,295
McClure Watters	Economic appraisal	1	2,625
BDO Stoy Hayward	Updating of economic model	1	2,100
SGS Yarsley	Surveillance Audits ISO 9000	1	980
SGS Yarsley	Surveillance Audits ISO 9000	1	1,970
ComputaCentre	Management & advice re Client Contact Management System (CCMS)	1	9,375
In-Form Consult	Independent review of Electronic Data Records Management System	1	22,016
Governetz	Market research/ public sector relocation	1	11,290
IBM	Market Research/ Shared Services Business Case	1	20,000
Promar International	Market Research	1	15,800
Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland	Research	1	5,000
NDPB's	sub total	39	395,644
Total		44	433,160

DETI & NDPBS 2005-06

Name of Consultant	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Consultancy Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
DETI			
Ray Payne	Interim Project Management	1	3,224
Ian Brown	Resource Accounts assistance	1	10,000
R E Simon (IBM)	Advice on use of bespoke software package IBM Director	1	1,295
Singularity	Advice on use of bespoke software package - Workflow	1	1,000
Real Asset Management (Formerly Britannia)	Real Asset Management	1	1,025
Lorraine Adams Hallmark Quality Assurance Ltd	Personnel Development - Audit ISO9001 - 2000	1	600
Regional Forecasts LTD	Comparative analysis, monitoring and forecasting of NI Economy	1	20,620
PWC and Tony Dignan	NI Secondary effects model (NISEM)	1	9,400
John Wright	Legislation	1	4,250
Brian Arlow	Development of Social Economy Case Studies	1	6,900
DETI	Sub Total	10	58,314
NDPBs			
Ernst & Young	VAT Advice	1	3,500
WA Partnership	Lesson plans for Education Portal	1	3,825
H Scott	Advice on A-Z Handbook	1	150
Prof. E Evason	Advice on A-Z Handbook	1	150
J Hughes	Advice on Buy Rights publication	1	125
B Campbell	Advice on School Poster competition	1	150

Name of Consultant	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Consultancy Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
A Haughan	Work on Business Portal	1	1,000
Trading Standards Institute	Assistance with Financial Capability Schools Quiz	1	1,500
Anglewise	Media Consultation	1	2,602
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Review of Financial System	1	6,300
G Locke	Review of Switching Banks	1	300
S Miskelly	Competition Commission Banking Investigation	1	6,050
A Laird	Consultancy Assistance re Competition Commission Banking Investigation	1	1,500
J Crothers	Review of Universal Banking Report	1	75
P McGarry	Review of Universal Banking Report	1	600
DMS Personnel Consultants	Assistance with Interview Process	1	800
John Wright	Review of Legal Service Provision	1	4,500
Deloitte	Review of Funding Options	1	20,750
SGS Yardsley	BS7799 Certification	1	1,048
SGS Yardsley	BS7799 Assessment	1	1,182
SGS Yardsley	BS7799 Certification	1	1,040
SGS Yardsley	ISO Audits	1	392
Dr Jack Patterson	Start Final Tech Review - ST200	1	1,429
McCaughan Associates	Start Final Tech Review - ST229	1	4,080
Ken Powles	Event management	1	6,500

Name of Consultant	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Consultancy Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
Professor Mark Hart	Analysis of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) NI 2005 Survey	1	41,250
NDPB's	Sub Total	26	110,798
Total		36	169,112

DETI AND NDPBS 2006-07

Name of Consultant Employed	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
Grant Thornton	Financial/legal advice.	1	1,650
Sinead Boyle	Consultancy	1	300
DETI	sub total	2	1,950
NDPBs			
CHL Consulting	Next Steps Plan for TSP	1	10,000
Mr Tom Blacker	Document on the Draft Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006	1	5,254
University of Bristol	Financial Capability Analysis	1	2,625
Mr Charles Coulthard	Review of Water Licence	1	7,000
Miss Joanne Crothers	Preparation of a report on food access for the older consumer	1	1,000
Mr Sam Miskelly	Competition Commission's UK Groceries Market Investigation	1	1,540
Alan Walker	Competition Commission banking investigation	1	325
Alan Walker	Public Transport	1	250
Stratagem	Public Affairs Advice	1	4,775
Stratagem	Strategic advice on water reform	1	588
Stratagem	Information Provision	1	3,525

Name of Consultant Employed	Nature of Consultancy Work	Number of Contracts	Value of Contract (£'s)
RMB Consulting	Organisational review for Investors In People award	1	1,250
Strategic Investment Board	Advice on Water Services Review of Business Plan	1	12,338
AVIA Solutions Limited	Air Access	1	8,500
Deloitte	Project Initiation Support for Invest NI's KMP9 Offers and Claims project	1	14,813
PWC	Audit	1	1,500
KPMG	Phase one - review of delivery of Start A Business Programme	1	20,000
PWC	Re-examination of BET files	1	5,000
PWC	Forensic Assignment from AIDB	1	1,600
SGS UK	ISO 9000:2000 Quality award	1	4,007
Richard Jeffrey-Cook	Electronic File Management system.	1	19,500
Dr Jack Patterson	Start Technical Appraisal - ST268	1	2,000
IFF Research	Data Supply for Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey	1	42,662
Professor Mark Hart	Analysis of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) NI 2006 Survey	1	24,925
NDPB	sub total	24	194,977
Total		26	196,927

European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what issues have delayed

the implementation of the European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme, and when will this fund be accessible to all its target groups.

(AQW 6921/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The implementation of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Competitiveness Programme has not been delayed. The Operational Programme was formally approved by the European Commission on 31 October 2007. The Northern Ireland Programme was one of the first new Competitiveness and Employment Programmes 2007-13 to be adopted by the Commission.

The formal launch of the Operational Programme took place in Belfast on 14 April 2008 to coincide with the visit of the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Danuta Hubner, to present the First Report of the EU Task Force for Northern Ireland.

Expenditure is eligible from, and if appropriate can be backdated to, 1 January 2007. The activities described in the Operational Programme will be delivered via a number of schemes and operations, many of which are already available to the target Groups while other new schemes and operations are in the process of being developed.

The Operational Programme covers a seven-year period 2007-13, with a further two year period up to 31 December 2015 for expenditure to be incurred. The Programme includes a range of activities some of which may be implemented at different times over the entire nine year period, and the EU implementation arrangements allow for adjustments to be made during the lifetime of the Programme to reflect changing circumstances. The Managing Authority will monitor closely the progress of the Programme to effect its implementation.

European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are in place to ensure that the European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme is extended beyond 2013, to off-set the delay in the implementation of this fund and prevent the loss of any monies. (AQW 6922/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The implementation of the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland has not been subject to delay. Expenditure is eligible from, and if appropriate can be backdated to, 1 January 2007.

The Programme covers the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013. Activities to be funded must be approved within this period, EU regulations however

allow for eligible expenditure on approved activities to be incurred up to the end of December 2015.

Reconnect Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if, given the success of the uptake on the Reconnect scheme, there are any plans to reopen the grant aid scheme for renewable energy sources. (AQW 6938/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Reconnect scheme was part of the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund, a 2 year direct rule initiative introduced by the former Secretary of State, Peter Hain. The scheme was always planned to end on 31 March 2008. DETI is currently evaluating the findings of a review of the sustainable energy market, which made a preliminary assessment of Reconnect. Before making any decisions in respect of possible future funding of a domestic microgeneration initiative a full evaluation of the scheme will be required. Any additional support going forward will need to take into account changing market conditions, other Government initiatives, value for money and the effect on competitiveness.

Departmental Land

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the land owned by his Department in the (i) Ballymoney Borough Council; (ii) Ballymena Borough Council; and (iii) Moyle District Council, areas. (AQW 6998/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department's land holding is owned and managed by Invest NI.

Invest NI currently owns approximately 100 acres across the Ballymoney, Ballymena and Moyle Council areas. 35 acres are currently unlet and are available to its client companies. Figures are correct as at 31 March 2008.

A table has been provided showing the breakdown of the landholding in each of three council areas.

Invest NI land is held for client company projects with an approved business case and a demonstrable property need. Having had three very successful years in site sales, Invest NI's available landholding has now reduced to 781 acres across Northern Ireland. Again figures are correct as at 31st March 2008.

INVEST NI LAND HOLDING IN BALLYMONEY, BALLYMENA AND MOYLE COUNCIL AREAS AS AT 31 MARCH 2008

Industrial Estate Location	Council Area	Land Holding (Acres)	Land Available (Acres)
Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	12.75	1.70
Woodside Road (East/West)	Ballymena	80.52	31.60
Queen Street	Ballymena	0.65	0.00
Leyland Road	Moyle	4.90	2.00
Cushendall	Moyle	1.13	0.00
Total		99.95	35.3

Renewable Energy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what monitoring is carried out in relation to the costs charged by firms approved by his Department, for the installation of renewable energy equipment under grants. (AQW 7031/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

All renewable energy installations supported by the Department's Reconnect scheme are carried out by installers registered with the Renewable Energy Installer Academy. A database of all applications to the scheme is maintained and monitored by technical personnel. Exceptional costs are easily identified and investigated further by a team leader as necessary. The cost of installations under Reconnect will be one aspect of the full evaluation of the scheme which the Department will be carrying out later in the year.

Employment Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for employment rates in each (i) local council area; and (ii) Social Security/Job Seeker's Office area, for each of the last five years. (AQW 7119/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates of the working age employment rate in each District Council Area, 2002 to 2006, are shown in the table below. These estimates are not available at Social Security/Job Seeker's Office area.

WORKING AGE¹ EMPLOYMENT RATE, 2002 - 2006

District Council Area	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Antrim	77%	78%	80%	75%	82%

District Council Area	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Ards	70%	67%	69%	72%	71%
Armagh	66%	67%	73%	73%	71%
Ballymena	75%	77%	75%	77%	74%
Ballymoney	71%	66%	65%	74%	78%
Banbridge	71%	69%	77%	75%	72%
Belfast	61%	60%	59%	63%	66%
Carrickfergus	76%	78%	76%	79%	79%
Castlereagh	79%	82%	71%	74%	82%
Coleraine	68%	73%	66%	70%	66%
Cookstown	74%	76%	73%	64%	62%
Craigavon	68%	64%	70%	70%	69%
Derry	56%	50%	54%	60%	61%
Down	70%	74%	71%	68%	68%
Dungannon	62%	63%	69%	71%	68%
Fermanagh	69%	66%	66%	64%	57%
Larne	78%	81%	80%	80%	77%
Limavady	67%	68%	62%	62%	56%
Lisburn	65%	69%	74%	75%	72%
Magherafelt	66%	63%	66%	76%	71%
Moyle	59%	66%	77%	58%	50%
Newry & Mourne	63%	66%	62%	65%	66%
Newtownabbey	81%	81%	73%	68%	71%
North Down	72%	73%	72%	73%	72%
Omagh	66%	62%	67%	64%	69%
Strabane	55%	63%	50%	51%	60%
Northern Ireland	68%	68%	67%	69%	69%

1 The term working age refers to females aged 16 to 59 and males aged 16 to 64.

Estimates at District Council Area level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution and, in particular, changes from year to year should not be used in isolation from the figures for a run of years.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Annual dataset 2002- 2006

Renewable Energy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans he has to give greater support to renewable energy projects. (AQW 7120/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Renewables Obligation (NIRO) is the main

support mechanism for renewables development in Northern Ireland – it is focused on the generation of electricity from renewable sources in support of our 12% target for the proportion of our electricity consumption that is to come from renewable sources by 2012. Following a UK-wide consultation last year on the NIRO, and similar obligations in GB with which the NIRO operates, it is proposed that the obligations will be amended to provide greater support for more costly or emerging renewable technologies (eg tidal power) and for microgeneration projects. A preliminary consultation of the implications of these ‘banding’ proposals was published by DETI on 19 May and a further statutory consultation will be undertaken later this year with a view to implementation from 1 April 2009.

Radox Manufacturing and Research Facility

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of (i) the decision by Radox to locate its new manufacturing and research facility in the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) the performance of Invest NI during the course of its negotiations with Radox. (AQW 7131/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am, of course, disappointed that Radox Laboratories has announced plans to create 135 jobs in County Donegal, however Radox did not provide Invest NI with a proposal seeking assistance for new manufacturing facilities in Northern Ireland. Invest NI has, as a matter of public record, stated that had Radox provided it with the opportunity, Invest NI would have made every attempt to secure this project for Northern Ireland.

Invest NI is fully accountable for the efficient and effective use of public funds and, as such, must follow best practice guidelines when appraising projects for support.

Therefore, Invest NI must appraise all projects at an appropriate level given such factors as scale of the project, risk levels, financial performance and level of financial assistance requested. As you know, my department works closely with Invest NI and is satisfied that it is applying a proportionate level of governance in relation to applications for financial assistance. I would add that during the financial year 2007-2008, Invest NI made in excess of 2,200 separate offers of support including 14 follow on overseas investments and 20 new first time foreign direct investment.

I recognize that Radox is an important indigenous company in a targeted growth sector. Invest NI has had a long established relationship with Radox and

has agreed a number of substantial offers of support including an offer for £16 million in 2003. Invest NI has and will continue to work with the company to encourage expansion at the company's Crumlin facility. In pursuit of such expansion, Invest NI had arranged a meeting, prior to the announcement in respect of the County Donegal factory, with the Managing Director of Randox for 16 May 2008, in order to discuss potential development opportunities. The meeting took place on 16 May 2008 as planned and it resulted in a productive and positive discussion.

I can assure you that I will continue to be in regular contact with Invest NI to follow up on progress in respect of the potential projects.

St Patrick's Day Celebrations

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 5363/08, for his assessment of the contribution made to levels of community support for St Patrick's Day celebrations by displays of political flags and emblems.

(AQW 7127/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has encouraged District Councils to develop cross-community policies in respect of flags and emblems. During 2006 and 2007, NITB supported the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Downpatrick and Armagh through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). The aim was to develop the product for international visitors, whilst also meeting the social development objectives of IFI. To ensure cross community support, the councils, who operate individual emblems and flags policies, issued a dedicated joint 'St. Patrick' flag for these events, that was not linked to one community or the other.

NITB considers that, if developed appropriately, St Patrick's Day celebrations could offer some tourism potential.

ENVIRONMENT

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action she is taking to ensure that the Ards and Down Area Plan is announced urgently. (AQW 6769/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): As previously reported, the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) report on the Ards and Down

Area Plan Public Inquiry has now been received. My Department has put in place a dedicated team of officers, which is currently considering the implications of the report and will shortly provide guidance on a possible date for adoption. We cannot provide a firm indication on timescales at this stage but our intention is to complete the adoption stage as quickly as possible.

The PAC report can only be made available by the Department to the public and elected representatives when it completes the adoption process and publishes the adopted plan, with or without modifications and its content in respect of any site, including the site referred to by Mr Shannon, is confidential until that time.

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when the findings of the Ards and Down Area Plan will be made available to (i) the public; and (ii) elected representatives, in light of a potential economic recession. (AQW 6770/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As previously reported, the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) report on the Ards and Down Area Plan Public Inquiry has now been received. My Department has put in place a dedicated team of officers, which is currently considering the implications of the report and will shortly provide guidance on a possible date for adoption. We cannot provide a firm indication on timescales at this stage but our intention is to complete the adoption stage as quickly as possible.

The PAC report can only be made available by the Department to the public and elected representatives when it completes the adoption process and publishes the adopted plan, with or without modifications and its content in respect of any site, including the site referred to by Mr Shannon, is confidential until that time.

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the outcome of the Ards and Down Area Plan finding for light industrial land between Kiltonga and Milecross Road, Newtownards. (AQW 6771/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As previously reported, the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) report on the Ards and Down Area Plan Public Inquiry has now been received. My Department has put in place a dedicated team of officers, which is currently considering the implications of the report and will shortly provide guidance on a possible date for adoption. We cannot provide a firm indication on

timescales at this stage but our intention is to complete the adoption stage as quickly as possible.

The PAC report can only be made available by the Department to the public and elected representatives when it completes the adoption process and publishes the adopted plan, with or without modifications and its content in respect of any site, including the site referred to by Mr Shannon, is confidential until that time.

Infringement of Signage Regulations

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) telephone warnings; (ii) letters issued; and (iii) site visits, in relation to infringements of signage regulations by small businesses in the countryside. (AQW 6780/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service does not use the telephone to issue warnings in relation to infringements of signage regulations, nor for any other type of breach of planning control. These are done in writing. A site visit is undertaken in relation to each case and it may be necessary to carry out further visits to ascertain whether the sign has been removed in the event of court action.

However, it has not been possible to provide the information requested since this would require the manual scrutiny of several hundred enforcement files to check the number of letters issued and the site visits that were carried out. This information could not be provided within the time available and would incur disproportionate costs.

New Local Councils

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if she has a name for the new super council for Ards and North Down. (AQW 6844/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The naming of the new councils will initially be a matter for the new Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

The Commissioner will name the new districts in the provisional recommendations. There will then be an opportunity for local people to make representations on the names either at public hearings or in writing.

Under section 51 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, the new councils will be able to apply to the Department for their names to be changed by order, if they so wish.

Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what action she has taken to address the availability of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) licences for drivers from Eastern European countries who have not been properly tested, and what checks are currently carried out to confirm the validity of HGV licences. (AQW 6878/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Driving licences issued by member states of the European Economic Area (EEA) are mutually recognised throughout the EEA. Driver licensing and testing arrangements throughout the EEA meet certain minimum standards as set out in a number of European Directives.

Where the holder of a Community Licence which authorises the driving of Large Goods Vehicles (LGV) or Passenger-Carrying Vehicles (PCV) becomes resident in Northern Ireland he may continue to use that licence. However, the licence will remain valid only for a limited period, dependant upon the holder's age. After this period, he must exchange his licence for one issued in Northern Ireland, although there is no requirement that he undertakes a further driving test. The holder of a Community Licence which includes LGV or PCV entitlement is required to register with the Department within a year of becoming resident. All driving licences submitted for exchange or registration are examined to ensure authenticity. This checking procedure may require the licence to be verified by the issuing authority.

A further EU directive will introduce the Certificate of Professional Competence, in September 2008 (for passenger-carrying vehicles) and September 2009 (for goods vehicles). This Directive requires the holders of such licences to undertake periodic training, thereby contributing to increasing road safety.

Enforcement officers attached to the Driver & Vehicle Agency conduct regular spot checks on goods vehicles at the roadside. In circumstances where a foreign driver is detected driving in Northern Ireland without a valid driving licence, the driver is normally arrested by police, formally charged and then released on recognizance to appear at a magistrates court within 28 days. During the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 there were fifty goods vehicle drivers detected and reported for prosecution by DVA enforcement officers on grounds of a driver licensing offence.

Strangford Lough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what financial support is available for a group wishing to conduct a clean-up of Strangford Lough Islands,

and what additional support can be provided in the form of manpower and boats. (AQW 6879/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Strangford Lough Management Advisory Committee (SLMAC), part funded by Environment and Heritage Service, would be delighted to work with your group, particularly if they would like to do something over the coming weeks as the annual Strangford Lough Spring Clean gets underway all around the Lough.

I am aware that you have already written to the Strangford Lough Office, whose staff have since been trying, to make contact, and who would be delighted to facilitate such a positive and initiative.

Dr Lynn Gilmore of the Strangford Lough Office works on a whole range of voluntary initiatives with local people and Lough users and she is coordinating the Spring Clean. She will co-ordinate with Lough managers, including the National Trust and local councils, on such matters as transport to the islands and disposal of waste collected.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of the Environment to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services her Department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6903/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The tables below set out details of consultancy service contracts, for each of the last 4 years, that did not have to go out to public tender:

2004/05

Consultant	Description	Amount £
CIPFA	Scoping study of local government finance legislation in GB (Local Government)	6,750
Government Actuary's Department	Pensions regulations advice (Local Government)	10,157
Belfast City Council	Best Value (Local Government)	3,454
MORI MRC	Customer Survey – DVLNI	7,598
Penna	Investors in People Network Meeting (DVLNI)	70
DJ Cleland	Planning – Special Investigation	18,529
PriceWaterhouse-Coopers	Advice on and production of the annual business plan (DVTa)	33,780
MJCA	Expert Witness Report (EHS)	3,920

Consultant	Description	Amount £
OPDC	Facilitator for Built Heritage Senior Staff Development (EHS)	5,265
Total		89,523

2005/06

Consultant	Description	Amount £
Improvement & Development Agency	Peer support for Local Government Taskforce within the Review of Public Administration programme	88,115
Sandy Blair / Bill Howat / Anne O'Keefe	Independent expert support to Local Government Taskforce	8,445
Declan Hall	Chairman of Councillors' Remuneration Working Group (Local Government)	23,452
Lady McCollum / Sid McDowell	Interview Panel member for NILGOSC chairman (Local Government)	3,064
CIPFA	Technical Accountancy support service (Local Government)	16,830
Jim Cavalleros	Business Planning Zones	2,000
Sidney McDowell / David Stewart / Corinne Swain / WH Walker	Examination in Public – Belfast City Airport (Planning Service)	78,942
Ken Millar Consultancy Ltd	Planning – Special Investigation	3,644
W H Walker	Planning – Special Investigation	7,385
Prof David Wilson	Hazardous Waste Forums (EHS)	21,632
Jane Crone & Associates	Environmental Framework Directive – Stakeholder Workshop Facilitation (PEPG)	2,000
Gregory Hunt Chartered Institute of Arbitrators	Develop Mediation and Arbitration Services for the Levy Credit Scheme (PEPG)	5,000
Total		260,509

2006/07

Consultant	Description	Amount £
Colin Knox	Advisor to Central Local Government Relations Sub-Group	6,430
APSE	External input to the Human Resources Local Government Taskforce Sub-Group	2,046
David Howard	Independent assessor for the appointment of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner	1,745

Consultant	Description	Amount £
D J Cleland	Planning – Special Investigation	2,832
TRL Ltd	Review of forecasts and targets for the Road Safety Strategy	4,762
PriceWater-houseCoopers	Advice on and production of the annual business plan (DVTA)	19,500
Dr C Flynn	Preparation of material for Curatorial Recruitment (EHS)	5,520
Mr F Ledgerwood	Decontamination Policy for the NICS (EHS)	10,000
Natural Environment Research	Technical support to Garvary Lodge PPC Appeal (EHS)	16,676
Circus	EHS (NI) Engagement Scoping Study	10,000
Capita Symonds	Waste Statistical Report (EHS)	29,613
Jacobs Ltd	Preparation of draft PPC Permit for proposed Landfill Site (EHS)	12,367
Gregory Hunt Chartered Institute of Arbitrators	Develop Mediation and Arbitration Services for the Levy Credit Scheme (PEPG)	5,000
Total		126,491

Consultant	Description	Amount £
D J Cleland	Planning – Special Investigation	953
D J Cleland	Planning – Special Investigation	675
Prof Greg Lloyd	Independent Expert – Reform Programme (Planning Service)	30,000
PriceWater-houseCoopers	Advice on and production of the annual business plan (DVA Testing)	19,500
Aardvark Geographical Services	Geological Garden – Crawfordsburn Country Park (EHS)	30,000
Jacobs Ltd	Preparation of draft Financial Provision Consultation for Waste Licensing (EHS)	9,937
GAIA Law	Legal input into Waste Matters (PEPG)	40,000
GAIA Law	Legal input into draft Nitrate Action Programme amending regulations to transpose EC decision granting derogation to NI (PEPG)	10,000
Total		175,565

2007/08

Consultant	Description	Amount £
BDO Stoy Hayward	Economic modelling of the council model – Review of Public Administration Programme (Local Government)	15,000
John Hunter	NILGOSC review (Local Government)	10,000
Ansac – Information Assurance	Consultants review of Information Management Assurance (DVA Testing)	9,500

Average Levels of Debt

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the total amount borrowed in (a) Capital Loans; and (b) Financial Lease Agreements; (ii) the current population estimates; and (iii) the average debt per head of population, for each district council. (AQW 6924/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The most up-to-date figures available relating to district councils' borrowings are for the 2006 / 2007 financial year. The details requested are set out in the following table.

District Council	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2004*	Capital Loans £	Average Debt Per Head of Population £	Financial Lease Agreements £	Average Debt Per Head of Population £
Antrim	49,833	21,463,047	431	1,635,543	33
Ards	74,648	15,736,108	211	621	<1
Armagh	54,876	20,161,749	367	69,771	1
Ballymena	60,026	34,025,917	567	0	0
Ballymoney	28,260	8,327,623	295	0	0
Banbridge	43,774	12,944,711	296	48,743	1
Belfast	268,978	21,132,573	79	0	0
Carrickfergus	38,715	11,237,979	290	541,450	14
Castlereagh	65,795	19,862,343	302	1,158,832	18

District Council	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2004*	Capital Loans £	Average Debt Per Head of Population £	Financial Lease Agreements £	Average Debt Per Head of Population £
Coleraine	56,530	27,199,696	481	0	0
Cookstown	33,660	1,777,695	53	0	0
Craigavon	83,168	8,285,181	100	0	0
Down	66,759	15,047,691	225	910,938	14
Dungannon and South Tyrone	49,307	1,995,999	40	687,730	14
Fermanagh	59,279	2,680,197	45	1,006,375	17
Larne	30,908	6,567,321	212	0	0
Limavady	34,010	8,975,699	264	0	0
Lisburn	110,247	20,380,663	185	0	0
Londonderry	106,889	21,108,714	197	0	0
Magherafelt	41,296	0	0	0	0
Moyle	16,424	7,843,152	478	0	0
Newry and Mourne	90,290	20,607,681	228	0	0
Newtownabbey	80,279	27,943,248	348	0	0
North Down	77,624	21,670,731	279	0	0
Omagh	50,082	9,474,237	189	406,585	8
Strabane	38,665	2,569,365	66	0	0
Total	1,710,322	369,019,320	216	6,466,588	4

* Population data applicable to the 2006 / 2007 financial year.

Planning Policy Statement 14

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment if, within the review of Planning Policy Statement 14, she will make special provision for people with disabilities who need to build a new house; and if she will ensure that there is provision for small rural businesses to establish in the countryside. (AQW 6967/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The work of the Executive Subcommittee as set out in the paper on the findings emerging from the review of draft PPS 14, issued on 11 February 2008, referred to possible relaxations on the farm diversification policy and to proposals for the reintroduction of a personal and domestic circumstances policy.

I expect to submit a revised draft PPS 14 to the Executive shortly with a view to issuing for public consultation.

Pollution Incidents in the Three Milewater River

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment how many pollution incidents have been

reported and logged on feeder streams of the Three Milewater river since 2007; what action her officials have taken to identify the sources of pollution on these streams; and what steps have been taken to reduce the risk of repeated pollution incidents on these streams. (AQW 6969/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Records held by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) show that, since 1 January 2007, a total of 14 pollution incidents have been investigated within the Three Milewater catchment area – 10 during 2007 and 4 since 1 January 2008. All have been categorised as being of ‘low severity’.

In all cases, EHS Water Quality Inspectors commence an investigation by attempting to trace the source of a polluting discharge. In the case of the Three Milewater catchment area, EHS officers have been working on a number of fronts to identify pollution sources and reduce the risk of repeated incidents occurring:-

- Liaising with Education and Library Board officials to correct a sewer problem affecting one of their school premises;
- Examining how best to identify all premises in the area where domestic waste water outlets have been wrongly connected to the storm drains; and

- Ensuring that, where relevant, industrial premises are regulated under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Traffic Accidents

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of traffic accidents for each of the five years ending 31 December 2007 that were directly attributed to vehicles that were not considered roadworthy and required, but did not have, a valid MoT certificate. (AQW 6981/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency provide vehicle test certificate (MOT) expiry dates to the PSNI upon request. This will include for road traffic accidents and other motoring offences. Information of this nature is exempt from the non-disclosure provisions of the Data Protection Act (Section 29).

Bicycle Proficiency Test

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to reintroduce the bicycle proficiency test for primary schools. (AQW 7018/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to reintroduce the bicycle proficiency test for primary schools as it has never ceased to be offered. My Department has delivered cycling proficiency training in primary schools for almost 40 years. Each year, all primary schools are offered the opportunity to participate in the scheme which is aimed at primary 7 children. My Department supplies cycling proficiency training materials to participating schools, trains teachers to carry out instruction and provides some financial support to those teachers who fulfil this role. In 2007, 596 primary schools participated in the Scheme and almost 8,000 children passed the cycling proficiency test.

Illegal Waste Sites

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5130/08, to provide an update on the repatriation of waste from the illegal sites at Garrison, Co Fermanagh, and Trillick, Co Tyrone. (AQW 7034/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Officials from my Department are continuing to liaise with Dublin City Council with regard to their recent agreement on the letting of a contract for the removal and return of the waste from these sites.

Mill Pond in Castlewellsan

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what action her department has taken in relation to the draining of the Mill Pond, Castlewellsan, given the suffering of the wildlife and biodiversity of the area. (AQW 7044/08)

The Minister of the Environment: On Sunday 4 May at 22:40 hours a report of a black liquid being discharged into the Ballybannon River was investigated by a water quality inspector from the Environment and Heritage Service. The investigation revealed that a plume of discoloured water was entering the river from the Clarkhill Dam tributary. There were no dead or distressed fish observed downstream of the discharge and there was no smell from the water entering the river. For Health and Safety reasons the investigation was halted at this stage.

Upon further investigation the next morning it was concluded that the discolouration had been caused by the draining of the Mill Pond and that the water flowing through the Mill Pond from the feeder streams was picking up the fine muds from the bottom of the dam and causing discolouration.

Given that no polluting discharge was being made into the Ballybannon River, no offence was committed under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and consequently the investigation was terminated.

My officials had not visited the Mill Pond prior to its drainage and it is therefore not possible for me to state what the effect has been on local biodiversity or whether any offence was committed under the Wildlife Order 1985.

Habitat on Millstone Mountain

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost to (i) habitat; (ii) flora; and (iii) fauna, following the fire on Millstone Mountain in the high Mourne mountain range. (AQW 7045/08)

The Minister of the Environment: On 9 May 2008 approximately 30 hectares of Millstone Mountain was affected by a fire. The habitat damaged is dry dwarf shrub heath with small scattered pockets of scree which have suffered removal of the majority of the surface vegetation. This habitat consists of *Calluna vulgaris* / *Erica cinerea* dominated vegetation with smaller proportions of grasses and herbs within the sward.

The recovery of heathland from fire is well documented and Environment and Heritage Service expect such a heathland habitat to recover from this type of fire, to its original condition, within the short to medium term (5-10 years). A post fire

site survey indicates that while the majority of the surface vegetation was lost, it does not appear to have burnt into the soil profile thus enabling the habitat regeneration from seed and existing root stock.

Recent Pollution in Crumlin River

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the circumstances surrounding the pollution incident that occurred in the Crumlin River on 1 April 2007, for which Northern Ireland Water was recently fined; and to give her assessment on the severity of the fine imposed. (AQW 7055/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At Antrim Magistrates Court, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) pleaded guilty and was fined £5000 plus court costs for discharging polluting matter so that it entered a waterway namely the Crumlin River which is a tributary of Lough Neagh. NIW confirmed the incident at Crumlin Terminal Sewerage Pumping Station on 1 April 2007 was due to a mechanical failure of the pumps and a lack of capacity in the alarm system.

I welcome the tough action taken by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and the court fines handed out as a result of this incident. I believe this conviction and the level of fine imposed demonstrate the value of EHS's approach and its determination to conserve, protect and, where possible, improve the aquatic environment in Northern Ireland.

The level of the fine is a matter for the judiciary.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many pollution incidents has Northern Ireland Water been held responsible for; and to detail the fines and costs that were imposed by the courts in relation to these incidents, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7058/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Prior to 1 April 2007, 'crown discharges' made by the Department for Regional Development's Water Service were regulated by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and as such were exempt from prosecution. However, on 1 April 2007, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) was established with the loss of crown immunity and since then, for the period up to 31 December 2007, has been responsible for 261 pollution incidents. In terms of severity, 1 of these incidents was classified as 'high', 58 as 'medium' and 202 as 'low'.

Since 1 April 2007 EHS has applied its Enforcement Policy and Process on 49 occasions where NIW was determined to have been the

suspected polluter. Of these 2 cases are complete with resulting convictions; 3 cases are being progressed with the Office of Public Prosecution Service; 16 cases have been enforced through the use of Warning Letters; 1 case has been enforced through the use of a Water Order Enforcement Notice; On 3 occasions NIW have been issued with Advisory Letters; The remaining 24 cases are still under consideration.

EHS has taken successful prosecutions against the new company for 2 of these incidents and the following fines and costs were awarded by the courts:

- £200 plus costs of £186.10 for analysing samples taken from the polluting discharge from Dunmurry Waste Water Treatment Works; and
- £5000 plus costs of £155 for analysing a sample taken from the polluting discharge from Crumlin Terminal Sewage Pumping Station.

Ballycolman Sewage Pumping Station

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment if there will be a change in the current planning designation of the lands adjoining Ballycolman sewage pumping station in Strabane, from protected flood plain status to a status that would permit development on completion of the upgrade to the pumping station. (AQW 7200/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It is important to advise that Planning Service does not designate flood plains, however, it does take advice from Rivers Agency as to the level of flood risk when formulating Area Plans and in determining development proposals. You will be aware that in 1987 lands at Ballycolman were subject to flooding and measures have been taken to defend this land through erecting a flood wall which will be further assisted by a pumping station when completed. However, Rivers Agency has advised that whilst the probability of flooding has been reduced, it cannot entirely be eliminated.

Under the provisions of PPS15: Planning and Flood Risk there is presumption against development on land within defended areas of flood plains where the land was previously undeveloped, such as green fields and open spaces. There is also a presumption against the development of civil infrastructure and community facilities, such as hospitals schools and care homes.

Mill Pond in Castlewellan

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7044/08, whether officials from her Department will carry out an assessment of the current wildlife

and biodiversity at Mill Pond, Castlewellaan.
(AQW 7213/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Further to AQW 7044/08, my staff in Environment and Heritage Service will carry out an assessment of the current wildlife and biodiversity at the Mill Pond, Castlewellaan, as soon as possible.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff in his department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures.
(AQW 6043/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): 90 members of staff have received official warnings and 1 member of staff has faced formal disciplinary procedures since 8 May 2007.

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how much he spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008.
(AQW 6315/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Based on an indicative assessment of expenditure by the Department of Finance and Personnel in 2007-08, which is subject to further refinement, expenditure on advertising and publicity was £778,885.49. This includes £146,478 related to recruitment advertising on behalf of all Northern Ireland Departments.

Broken and Stolen Electrical Equipment

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of items of electronic equipment and data storage devices, including laptops, mobile phones, memory sticks, Personal Digital Assistants and Blackberries, that have been recorded as lost or stolen since 8 May 2007, broken down by Department.
(AQW 6497/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Each Northern Ireland Civil Service Department has confirmed that equipment, as specified in the attached table, has been recorded as lost or stolen since 8 May 2007.

Department	Item(s) Lost/Stolen	Notes
DARD	1 Laptop 2 Blackberry devices 2 Mobile phones 1 GPS system	Without SIM card
DCAL	1 Laptop	
DE	1 Blackberry	Subsequently recovered by PSNI
DEL	1 Laptop 1 Mobile Phone	
DETI	0	
DOE	5 Mobile phones 1 Digital Camera 1 GPS 72 system	
DFP	9 Laptops 1 PDA	
DHSSPS	1 Laptop 1 Memory Stick device 1 Mobile phone	
DRD	1 Digital Camera	
DSD	3 Laptops 2 Mobile Phones 2 Memory Stick devices	
OFMDFM	0	

Civil Servants Seeking Transfer

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answers to AQW 590/07 and AQW 4641/08, for his assessment of the increase in the number of civil servants seeking a transfer to Derry/Londonderry.
(AQW 6522/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: AQW 590/07 asked for the number of civil servants awaiting a transfer to the Derry City Council area. The answer (396) given was taken from the HRMS database and included all staff from throughout Northern Ireland who had submitted a transfer request into the City Council area.

AQW 4641/08 asked for the number of civil servants currently seeking transfer to a post in Londonderry. The answer (823) given was taken from the HRMS database and included all staff from throughout Northern Ireland who had submitted a transfer request to Londonderry but also included those staff already working in the city who had requested a transfer to another post in the city.

The relevant information on 24 April is:

- Number of staff with a transfer request for Londonderry is 832

- Number of staff whose current location is Londonderry is 384
- Number of staff whose current location is anywhere in Northern Ireland except Londonderry is 448.

The increase from 396 in June 2007 to 448 in April 2008 cannot be attributed to any particular reason.

Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin Hospital

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of (i) stillbirths; and (ii) neo-natal deaths, that occurred at Altnagelvin Hospital in each year since 1995. (AQW 6564/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The tables below give the number of stillbirths and neonatal deaths that occurred in Altnagelvin Hospital, registered in each year since 1997. Prior to 1997 place of death from the civil register is not held electronically.

TABLE: NUMBER OF STILLBIRTHS AND NEONATAL DEATHS IN ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL, 1995-2007^P

Registration Year ¹	Stillbirths in Altnagelvin Hospital	Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin Hospital
1995	Unavailable	Unavailable
1996	Unavailable	Unavailable
1997	14	8
1998	19	14
1999	15	7
2000	7	7
2001	12	7
2002	13	9
2003	17	6
2004	18	6
2005	11	17
2006	9	4
2007 ^P	12	5

^P Data for 2007 is provisional.

¹ Information on place of stillbirth and place of death is only available electronically from 1997.

Composition of Civil Service Staff

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each year between January 2003 and January 2008 inclusive, the (i) actual; and (ii) percentage, composition of Northern Ireland Civil Service non-industrial (a) part-time staff; and (b) full-time staff, broken down by gender. (AQW 6612/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is set out in the attached tables.

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2008

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	22,405	83.4	10,634	47.5	11,771	52.5
Part-Time	4,460	16.6	4,171	93.5	289	6.5
Total	26,865	100.0	14,805	55.1	12,060	44.9

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2007

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	23,555	84.0	11,063	47.0	12,492	53.0
Part-Time	4,476	16.0	4,193	93.7	283	6.3
Total	28,031	100.0	15,256	54.4	12,775	45.6

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2006

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	24,799	84.9	11,714	47.2	13,085	52.8
Part-Time	4,426	15.1	4,158	93.9	268	6.1
Total	29,225	100.0	15,872	54.3	13,353	45.7

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2005

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	25,228	86.4	12,108	48.0	13,120	52.0
Part-Time	3,976	13.6	3,762	94.6	214	5.4
Total	29,204	100.0	15,870	54.3	13,334	45.7

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2004

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	24,805	87.1	12,008	48.4	12,797	51.6
Part-Time	3,688	12.9	3,522	95.5	166	4.5
Total	28,493	100.0	15,530	54.5	12,963	45.5

PERMANENT NICS NON-INDUSTRIAL STAFF BY WORK PATTERN AND GENDER AT 1 JAN 2003

Staff Group	Total Staff		Gender			
			Female		Male	
	No	Col %	No	Row %	No	Row %
Full-Time	24,185	87.5	11,829	48.9	12,356	51.1
Part-Time	3,456	12.5	3,302	95.5	154	4.5
Total	27,641	100.0	15,131	54.7	12,510	45.3

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in his Department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade.
(AQW 6823/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is provided in the attached tables.

2003 - 2004

Grade	6-10 days	11-15 days	16-20 days	21-25 days	26-30 days	31-35 days	36-40 days	More than 40
AA			1					
AO	1	3	2	1	1	1	2	4
EO11	1				1	1		5
EO1		2	1			1	1	1
SO	1							2
DP+		1						3
Total	3	6	4	1	2	3	3	15

2004 - 2005

Grade	6-10 days	11-15 days	16-20 days	21-25 days	26-30 days	31-35 days	36-40 days	More than 40
AA								3
AO		3		3	1	1	1	4
EO11	1	1	1			1		1
EO1							1	4
SO		1			2			1
DP+								6
Total	1	5	1	3	3	2	2	19

2005 - 2006

Grade	6-10 days	11-15 days	16-20 days	21-25 days	26-30 days	31-35 days	36-40 days	More than 40
AA	2							
AO	1	2	2	3			2	7
EO11		2	1	1	1			2
EO1	1			2		1		4
SO		1		1	1			2
DP+			1					1
Total	4	5	4	7	2	1	2	16

2006 - 2007

Grade	6-10 days	11-15 days	16-20 days	21-25 days	26-30 days	31-35 days	36-40 days	More than 40
AA	1	1				1		
AO	2	3		4	2		1	8
EO11								2
EO1		1	1					1
SO		1			1			1
DP+	1				1			5
Total	4	6	1	4	4	1	1	17

2007 - 2008

Grade	6-10 days	11-15 days	16-20 days	21-25 days	26-30 days	31-35 days	36-40 days	More than 40
AA	3				1			1
AO	1	4	1	2	1			5
EO11		1		1				3
EO1	1				1			3
SO	1	2		1				3
DP+							1	3
Total	6	7	1	4	3		1	18

Notes

Day totals are inclusive, i.e. more than 5 days is 6 – 10 days inclusive, more than 10 days is 11 – 15 days inclusive etc.

Inheritance Tax

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will make representations to the UK Government concerning the possible need to amend the Inheritance Tax Act 1984, arising out of the decision of the Special Commissioners in the case of Philip Norman McCall, Bernard Joseph Anthony Keenan (Personal Representative of Eileen McClean (dec'd)) and The Commissioners for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, in relation to the treatment of conacre/agistment lettings being regarded as a business which consisted wholly or mainly of the making of investments. (AQW 7066/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: This decision of the Special Commissioners has profound implications for the agricultural industry in Northern Ireland. Letting land under conacre and agistment

is relatively common within Northern Ireland. The assessment of inheritance tax needs to reflect the particular nature of agricultural land usage in Northern Ireland. I will await the outcome of the appeal process and in the event the decision is not reversed will make representations to the Chancellor on this matter

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Attacks on Causeway Hospital Staff

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for the last year, (i) the number of attacks on staff at the Causeway Hospital; and (ii) the number of these attacks that were reported to the PSNI. (AQW 6794/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):

- (i) In the last year (1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008) a total of 42 physical attacks on staff at the Causeway Hospital were reported.
- (ii) Of these, 3 were reported to the PSNI.

Practising Dentists

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of practising dentists; (ii) the number of these that take Health Service patients; and (iii) the average waiting time for an appointment with a Health Service dentist, in the Limavady Borough Council area. (AQW 6796/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Central Services Agency holds a record of dentists who provide full or partial Health Service treatment to patients. Information on dentists exclusively providing private treatment is not available.

At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 15 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Limavady Borough Council area², and 28 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Coleraine Borough Council area². No information is available in respect of how many of these are currently accepting new Health Service patients but all had new registrations recorded during the period between April 2007 and March 2008.

Information on average waiting times for appointments with a Health Service dentist is not available.

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. Statistics are at 1st May 2008 and are based on the location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Practising Dentists

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of practising dentists; (ii) the number of these that take Health Service patients; and (iii) the average waiting time for an appointment with a Health Service dentist, in the Coleraine Borough Council area.(AQW 6797/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Central Services Agency holds a record of dentists who provide full or partial Health Service treatment to patients. Information on dentists exclusively providing private treatment is not available.

At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 15 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Limavady Borough Council area², and 28 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Coleraine Borough Council area². No information is available in respect of how many of these are currently accepting new Health Service patients but all had new registrations recorded during the period between April 2007 and March 2008.

Information on average waiting times for appointments with a Health Service dentist is not available.

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. Statistics are at 1st May 2008 and are based on the location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Myasthenia Gravis Disease

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement on the disease myasthenia gravis; and to detail the action his department is taking to support people who have been diagnosed with this disease. (AQW 6799/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 893/08.

Fire and Ambulance Service

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of ambulance drivers and fire fighters with driving responsibilities who have been convicted of drink driving offences in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6807/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is set out in the table below:

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Fire & Rescue Service	1	1	1	0	1
Ambulance Service	0	1	0	1	0

NIFRS has advised that fire fighters with driving responsibilities convicted of drink driving offences are retrained before being allowed to return to duties involving driving. NIAS has advised that its Disciplinary Procedure categorises alcohol/drug abuse whilst on duty as gross misconduct and any issues of this nature follow due process in this regard ie Wilful Misbehaviour/Misconduct – of a serious nature including being unfit for duty due to the consumption of alcohol or substance abuse. Loss of license due to conduct outside the workplace is also dealt with under the Trust's Disciplinary Procedure.

Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of fire and rescue service vehicles based at each fire and rescue service station; (ii) the age and recorded mileage of each fire and rescue service vehicle; (iii) the number of new fire and rescue service vehicles that were delivered to fire and rescue service stations for each of the last 5 years; and (iv) if his department replaces fire and rescue service vehicles if they are no longer fit for purpose. (AQW 6809/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would refer the Member to my answers to AQWs 5221/08 and 6283/08, which detailed the age, number and location of fire appliances in each fire station across Northern Ireland and the fleet maintenance and replacement procedures for fire appliances respectively. Further information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Public Inquiry into Mrs McGinley's Death

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his reasons for

not conducting a public inquiry into the cause of Mrs Maureen McGinley's 34 post mortem fractures.
(AQW 6810/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The events surrounding Mrs McGinley's death have already been subjected to a very comprehensive examination both internally by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and independently by the Coroners Service.

Despite that comprehensive investigation it has not been possible to provide a totally satisfactory explanation for the fractures which Mrs McGinley sustained after her death.

I am satisfied that the Trust has acted appropriately in this case and I am, therefore, of the view that any further review of the circumstances of the case is unlikely to shed any further light on how this incident occurred. David Hanson MP, Minister of State with responsibility for the Coroners Service has expressed a similar view.

The family have appointed their own independent expert to look into the matter. Naturally I would want to consider his report if it reaches a different conclusion.

Dental Service

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how he is bringing forward the proposed new contracts for dentists, and to give a timescale within which he expects these negotiations to be completed.
(AQW 6814/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am totally committed to the aim of securing a robust and accessible health service dental service for everyone in Northern Ireland. Discussions are currently ongoing between my officials and representatives of the Dental Practice Committee (DPC) of the British Dental Association (BDA) on a new contract for Northern Ireland. This contract, when implemented, will give Health and Social Services Boards greater control over patient access to health service dentistry. The new contract will also deliver a revised remuneration system, which rewards dentists fairly for operating the new arrangements, thus addressing the dental profession's current concerns on this issue.

Further meetings are scheduled with the BDA in coming months, with the intention of piloting the new contract in 2009.

Dental Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all dental practices

in (i) Bangor; (ii) Holywood; (iii) Donaghadee; and (iv) any other area of North Down parliamentary constituency, that currently accept Health Service patients.
(AQW 6818/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No information is available in respect of which practices are currently accepting new Health Service patients. However, those that recorded new patients registered to a Health Service dentist within that practice, at any time during the period between April 2007 and March 2008, are shown in the tables below.

I) DENTAL PRACTICES IN BANGOR¹ THAT REGISTERED NEW HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
32 Abbey Street	Bangor	BT20 4JA
29a Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LF
109g Clandeboye Road	Bangor	BT20 3JW
38 Brunswick Road	Bangor	BT20 3DU
4 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
25 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LF
107 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LN
16 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
4 Bingham Street	Bangor	BT20 5DW
38 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
Springhill Surgery, 4a Kileen Avenue	Bangor	BT19 1NB
97 Brunswick Road	Bangor	BT20 3DW
1 Moira Drive	Bangor	BT20 4RN
Bloomfield Surgery, 95 Bloomfield Road	Bangor	BT20 4XA
22a Groomsport Road	Bangor	BT20 5LN
64 Donaghadee Rd	Bangor	BT20 4QX

Source: Central Services Agency

ii) Dental practices in Holywood¹ that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
116 High Street	Holywood	BT18 9HW
128 High Street	Holywood	BT18 9HW
32 Shore Road	Holywood	BT18 9HX

Source: Central Services Agency

iii) Dental practices in Donaghadee¹ that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
13 The Parade	Donaghadee	BT21 0AE
55/57 High Street	Donaghadee	BT21 0AQ

Source: Central Services Agency

- iv) Dental practices elsewhere in North Down Parliamentary Constituency that registered new Health Service patients in 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
1a Station Road	Helens Bay	BT19 1TN

Source: Central Services Agency

Note:

- 1 The above dental practices have been selected based on the town name appearing in the practice addresses held on the CSA database.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in his Department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6824/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is outlined below.

YEAR – 2003/04

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Senior Civil Service								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal		1	1					2
Staff Officer	1	1						2
Executive Officer I	1			2			1	2
Executive Officer II				1		1	2	2
Administrative Officer		1	2					4
Administrative Assistant	1							

YEAR – 2004/05

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Senior Civil Service								
Grade 7			1					1
Deputy Principal		1						2
Staff Officer	2							
Executive Officer I								
Executive Officer II	2				1			3
Administrative Officer					1			3
Administrative Assistant			1					1

YEAR – 2005/06

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Senior Civil Service								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal			1					1
Staff Officer	1							
Executive Officer I		1	1					1
Executive Officer II			2					4
Administrative Officer	2							4
Administrative Assistant								

YEAR – 2006/07

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Senior Civil Service								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal				1				1
Staff Officer								3
Executive Officer I	1							2

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Executive Officer II		1		2				4
Administrative Officer	1					1	1	4
Administrative Assistant								1

YEAR – 2007/08

Grade including analogous grades	>5 days	>10 days	>15 days	>20 days	>25 days	>30 days	>35 days	>40 days
Senior Civil Service								
Grade 7	1							1
Deputy Principal				1				2
Staff Officer		1	1	1				2
Executive Officer I								4
Executive Officer II			2					5
Administrative Officer		2					1	3
Administrative Assistant		1	2				1	

Accident and Emergency Ambulances

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5874/08, to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of times accident and emergency ambulances have broken down (i) in the ambulance depot; and (ii) whilst being driven on a public road.

(AQW 6833/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

NIAS is a regional service and in the event of vehicle non-starts or breakdowns will deploy reserve vehicles held in ambulance stations or the nearest available operational ambulance as appropriate.

Sun Bed Regulations

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans to introduce

regulations to control the use of sun beds.

(AQW 6834/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have no plans at present to introduce regulations to control the use of sunbeds.

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) has been asked to provide advice on the health effects of sunbed use. COMARE is an independent expert advisory committee which provides advice to Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations in relation to the health effects of natural and man-made radiation. Its report on sunbed use is expected by the end of this year.

In addition, the Sunbed Working Group of the Northern Ireland Melanoma Strategy Implementation Group (NIMSIG) is currently examining the issues relating to sunbeds and their use.

I will consider whether to propose legislation in the light of the COMARE report and of the work of the Sunbed Working Group.

Sun Bed Regulations

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any research carried out by his department into the number of under-16s that use sun beds.

(AQW 6835/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has not carried out any research into the use of sun beds by under-16s.

Vacant Consultant Posts

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the specialties attached to each of the current 39 vacant consultant posts.

(AQW 6840/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is provided in the following Table.

HSC Trust	Specialty	Number vacancies
Belfast	Histo/Cytopathology	1
	Gastroenterology	1
	Acute Medicine	1
	Haematology	3
	Renal Transplant Surgery	1
	Ear, Nose & Throat	1

HSC Trust	Specialty	Number vacancies
Belfast	Clinical Oncologist	1
	Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	1
	Psychiatry of old age	2
	General Adult Psychiatry	1
	Radiology	1
	Plastic Surgery with an Interest in Burns	1
	Neuroradiology	1
	General Surgery	1
	Occupational Medicine	1
	Restorative Dentistry	1
	Paediatrics - Inherited Metabolic Disease	1
	Neurology	1
	Special Care Dentistry	1
	Radiology and Nuclear Medicine	1
	Orthodontics	1
	Paediatric Nephrology	1
	Vascular Surgery	1
South Eastern	General & Respiratory Medicine	1
	Oral & Maxillo Facial Surgery	1
	Surgery - Urology	1
	Obstetrics & Gynaecology	1
Southern	Acute/Community Paediatrics	2
	Cardiology	1
	General Surgery	1
	Palliative Medicine	1
	Radiology	1
	Radiology - Musculo-skeletal, Trauma & Orthopaedics Service	1
Western	Rheumatologist	1
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	Dental	1
Total		39

Vacant Consultant Posts

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many of the

39 vacant consultant posts are needed for the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 6841/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Four of the 39 consultant vacancies declared as at 30th September 2007 were needed for the Ulster Hospital in the specialties of:

- General & Respiratory Medicine
- Oral & Maxillo Facial Surgery
- Surgery – Urology
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology

Source: South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust

Bangor Hospital

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to incorporate any new services into Bangor hospital. (AQW 6842/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans at this time for any new service developments at Bangor Community Hospital.

Bangor Hospital

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the new X-Ray machine for Bangor hospital. (AQW 6843/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new x-ray system for Bangor Community Hospital cost £55,801. Associated decommissioning and enabling works were £14,199, making a total of £70,000.

Dental Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all dental practices in (i) Ballycastle; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Ballymoney, that currently accept new Health Service patients. (AQW 6858/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No information is available in respect of which practices are currently accepting new Health Service patients. However, those that recorded new patients registered to a Health Service dentist within that practice, at any time during the period between April 2007 and March 2008, are shown in the tables below.

I) DENTAL PRACTICES IN BALLYCASTLE¹ THAT REGISTERED NEW HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
48 Ann Street	Ballycastle	BT54 6AD
79 Ann Street	Ballycastle	BT54 6AD

Source: Central Services Agency

II) DENTAL PRACTICES IN BALLYMENA¹ THAT REGISTERED NEW HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
6 Henry Street	Ballymena	BT42 3AH
73/75 Broughshane Street	Ballymena	BT43 6EB
20 Broughshane Street	Ballymena	BT43 6EB
21/23 Castle Street	Ballymena	BT43 7BT
38 Broughshane Street	Ballymena	BT43 6EB
Pentagon House, 19 George Street	Ballymena	BT43 5AP
25 Linenhall Street	Ballymena	BT43 5AJ
58 High Street	Ballymena	BT43 6DT
13-15 Duke Street	Ballymena	BT43 6BL
Rockfield Medical Centre, 73-75 Doury Road	Ballymena	BT43 6JD

Source: Central Services Agency

III) DENTAL PRACTICES IN BALLYMONEY¹ THAT REGISTERED NEW HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN 2007/08.

Address		Postcode
49 High Street	Ballymoney	BT53 6BG
5 Queen Street	Ballymoney	BT53 6HZ
25 Queen Street	Ballymoney	BT53 6HZ
22 Charles Street	Ballymoney	BT53 6DY
21 Portrush Road	Ballymoney	BT53 6BX

Source: Central Services Agency

Note:

- 1 The above dental practices have been selected based on the town name appearing in the practice addresses held on the CSA database.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: South Eastern Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting period for results of smear tests at the South Eastern Trust.
(AQW 6883/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 was provided in answer to AQW 6454/08.

The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is delivered on a Health and Social Service Board, rather than Health and Social Care Trust, configuration.

Cervical smear tests can be undertaken in a variety of settings including General Practice, Well Woman Clinics and Gynaecology and Colposcopy outpatient clinics. Smear tests are then sent to hospital laboratories, where each smear is screened. The laboratory then provides results, in the form of a report, to the taker of the smear.

Laboratories are located within each Health and Social Service Board area at Altnagelvin Area Hospital (WHSSB); Antrim Area Hospital (NHSSB); Belfast City Hospital (EHSSB) and Craigavon Area Hospital (SHSSB). Smears are sent to the relevant laboratory, depending upon the Health and Social Service Board of residence of the woman from whom the smear is taken.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recently published National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) draft guidance on wet age related macular degeneration treatment, what plans are in place to ensure that patients will not suffer undue delay while the NICE guidance awaits local review and approval.
(AQW 6884/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently appraising ranibizumab (Lucentis) and pegaptanib (Macugen) for the treatment of wet age related macular degeneration, and issued its final appraisal determination on 1 April 2008. Final guidance is expected to be published in June 2008.

My Department has established a link with NICE whereby all guidance published by the Institute from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. The guidance on Lucentis and Macugen will be considered under these arrangements when NICE publishes its final guidance.

In the interim, the decision on whether to fund a particular treatment is a matter for Health and Social Services Boards, as commissioners of services,

taking into account local circumstances, the strategic objectives established for the Health and Social Care network and demands and pressures generally for access to a wide range of new drugs and therapies. I understand that Boards are currently funding treatment with anti-VEGF drugs for patients with the greatest clinical priority.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Belfast Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting period for results of smear tests at the Belfast Trust.
(AQW 6885/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 was provided in answer to AQW 6454/08.

The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is delivered on a Health and Social Service Board, rather than Health and Social Care Trust, configuration.

Cervical smear tests can be undertaken in a variety of settings including General Practice, Well Woman Clinics and Gynaecology and Colposcopy outpatient clinics. Smear tests are then sent to hospital laboratories, where each smear is screened. The laboratory then provides results, in the form of a report, to the taker of the smear.

Laboratories are located within each Health and Social Service Board area at Altnagelvin Area Hospital (WHSSB); Antrim Area Hospital (NHSSB); Belfast City Hospital (EHSSB) and Craigavon Area Hospital (SHSSB). Smears are sent to the relevant laboratory, depending upon the Health and Social Service Board of residence of the woman from whom the smear is taken.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Western Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting period for results of smear tests at the Western Trust.
(AQW 6886/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 was provided in answer to AQW 6454/08.

The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is delivered on a Health and Social Service

Board, rather than Health and Social Care Trust, configuration.

Cervical smear tests can be undertaken in a variety of settings including General Practice, Well Woman Clinics and Gynaecology and Colposcopy outpatient clinics. Smear tests are then sent to hospital laboratories, where each smear is screened. The laboratory then provides results, in the form of a report, to the taker of the smear.

Laboratories are located within each Health and Social Service Board area at Altnagelvin Area Hospital (WHSSB); Antrim Area Hospital (NHSSB); Belfast City Hospital (EHSSB) and Craigavon Area Hospital (SHSSB). Smears are sent to the relevant laboratory, depending upon the Health and Social Service Board of residence of the woman from whom the smear is taken.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Southern Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting period for results of smear tests at the Southern Trust.
(AQW 6887/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 was provided in answer to AQW 6454/08.

The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is delivered on a Health and Social Service Board, rather than Health and Social Care Trust, configuration.

Cervical smear tests can be undertaken in a variety of settings including General Practice, Well Woman Clinics and Gynaecology and Colposcopy outpatient clinics. Smear tests are then sent to hospital laboratories, where each smear is screened. The laboratory then provides results, in the form of a report, to the taker of the smear.

Laboratories are located within each Health and Social Service Board area at Altnagelvin Area Hospital (WHSSB); Antrim Area Hospital (NHSSB); Belfast City Hospital (EHSSB) and Craigavon Area Hospital (SHSSB). Smears are sent to the relevant laboratory, depending upon the Health and Social Service Board of residence of the woman from whom the smear is taken.

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Northern Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting period for results of smear tests at the Northern Trust. (AQW 6888/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for issuing results of a smear test, by hospital laboratory, during 2007/08 was provided in answer to AQW 6454/08.

The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is delivered on a Health and Social Service Board, rather than Health and Social Care Trust, configuration.

Cervical smear tests can be undertaken in a variety of settings including General Practice, Well Woman Clinics and Gynaecology and Colposcopy outpatient clinics. Smear tests are then sent to hospital laboratories, where each smear is screened. The laboratory then provides results, in the form of a report, to the taker of the smear.

Laboratories are located within each Health and Social Service Board area at Altnagelvin Area Hospital (WHSSB); Antrim Area Hospital (NHSSB); Belfast City Hospital (EHSSB) and Craigavon Area Hospital (SHSSB). Smears are sent to the relevant laboratory, depending upon the Health and Social Service Board of residence of the woman from whom the smear is taken.

Priorities for Action 2008/09

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans have been submitted, by the relevant Health and Social Service Boards and Health and Social Care Trusts, to ensure that sufficient resourcing and capacity is in place so that all patients who require anti-vascular endothelial growth factor treatment for wet age related macular degeneration, are able to access such treatment. (AQW 6889/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Priorities for Action 2008/09 requires the HSC to ensure, by June 2008, that plans are in place for the development of services to preserve the sight of people affected by age-related macular degeneration, consistent with the emerging evidence base for the treatment of this condition.

Commissioners in Northern Ireland, currently provide funding for treatment with these drugs for patients with the greatest clinical priority. In the main, these are patients with second eye involvement in wet AMD, although other exceptional circumstances

may be considered. At February 2008, 120 people in Northern Ireland had been treated.

HSC Trusts are currently developing business cases for the further development of these services which will be submitted to commissioners for consideration in the near future.

Final decisions on the resources and capacity needed to deliver anti-vascular endothelial growth factor treatments for wet age related macular degeneration will depend on the outcome of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence appraisal of these technologies. The Institute's final guidance is expected to be published in June 2008.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services his Department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6905/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to reply to your Written Question AQW 6905/08, by the 23 May 2008. I will reply as soon as possible.

Closure of Hospital Wards

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6563/08, to detail the decisions that have been made to close further wards in each of Longstone Hospital, Mullinure Hospital and St Luke's Hospital, Armagh, in the next 18 to 24 months. (AQW 6974/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In line with its work to achieve the Programme for Government target that no one should be living permanently in hospital by 2013, the Southern Trust plans to re-settle a number of patients this year from one unit in Longstone Hospital to new supported accommodation in Bessbrook. The continuation of this resettlement programme will lead to the closure of two further units at this hospital by 2011, resulting in a total of 35 patients being resettled in the community.

There are no definitive plans to close wards at Mullinure Hospital.

At St. Luke's, 2 wards which had been temporarily re-sited there for the last 6 years from the Craigavon Area Hospital site, will return to their original location when the new Bluestone Unit there opens. Over the

next 3 years, it is planned that the number of beds available at St. Luke's will reduce by 30, with the associated closure of 3 long-stay wards in line with implementing the Bamford Review and the Priorities for Action target to reduce the number of long-stay patients by 10% by 2011. The proposed opening of new day hospitals in Newry and Dungannon and the expansion of Home Treatment Teams are integral to this process.

Closure of Hospital Wards

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6563/08, if patients will be transferred and staff made redundant due to the closure of wards at Longstone Hospital, Mullinure Hospital and St Luke's Hospital, Armagh in the next 18 to 24 months. (AQW 6977/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Trust is developing its services in line with the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability and the strategic direction for older people's services. This will enhance the quality of care for individuals, through the enhanced availability of community-based services, enabling fewer hospital admissions and shorter hospital stays. The Trust is also working to achieve the Programme for Government target that no one should be living permanently in hospital by 2013.

For Longstone Hospital, the Trust has plans to re-settle a number of patients this year from one unit to new supported accommodation in Bessbrook. The continuation of this resettlement programme will lead to the closure of two further units at the hospital by 2011, resulting in a total of 35 patients being resettled in the community.

There are no definitive plans to close wards at Mullinure Hospital.

At St. Luke's, two wards which had been temporarily re-sited there from the Craigavon Area Hospital site, will return to their original location when the Bluestone Unit there opens. The Trust is also working to reduce the number of beds available at this hospital by 30 by 2011, with the associated closure of 3 long stay wards in line with implementing the Bamford Review and the Priorities for Action target of reducing the number of long-stay patients in psychiatric hospitals by 10%. The opening of new day hospitals in Newry and Dungannon and the expansion of Home Treatment Teams are central to this process.

It is too early to specify the implications for staff of these service developments.

Health Service Pay Levels

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the problems encountered by certain Health Service staff who are now facing a clawback situation in relation to salaries having been deemed as overpaid. (AQW 6994/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Increases in pay above the agreed Agenda for Change rates payable at 1 April 2005 must be recouped in order to avoid a loss to the taxpayer. The process of recouping excess payments is governed by the Government Accounting (NI) Rules and applies to all public bodies. Health and Social Care employers are bound by these rules and must seek to recoup any excess payments in an equitable way. There are some considerations that the employer may take into account when recouping an excess payment. This must be considered on a case by case basis and includes any relevant personal circumstances of the employee or the cost-effectiveness of recovery action.

Respite Care Facility in Quarry Lane, Dungannon

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) on what date work was completed on the new respite care facility at Quarry Lane, Dungannon; (ii) why this facility is not open for use; and (iii) on what date it is expected that the facility will be open. (AQW 7121/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: (i) Work on the respite care facility at Quarry Lane, Dungannon was completed Mid February 2008; (ii) Difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and skilled staff delayed the opening of the facility; and (iii) It is expected that the facility will open on 1 July 2008 to provide day respite services, and will become fully operational from 1 September 2008.

Home-Help and Domiciliary Care Workers

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people were employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust as home-help/domiciliary care workers; (ii) how many of these workers have been on sick leave for periods of more than 1 week; and (iii) how many of these workers were absent for periods of more than 1 month, in (a) 2005-06; (b) 2006-07; and (c) 2007-08. (AQW 7207/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to reply to your Priority Written Question AQW 7207/08, by the 23 May 2008. I will reply as soon as possible.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are currently on sick leave in relation to clostridium difficile, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 7262/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to reply to your Priority Written Question AQW 7262/08, by the 23 May 2008. I will reply as soon as possible.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Unlawful Signage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to have all illegal signage removed from Department of Regional Development property, including recently erected symbols on lamp standards in Counties Tyrone and Armagh.
(AQW 5193/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): The erection of unlawful advertising signage within the boundaries of a public road is an offence under The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. My Department's Roads Service has power to remove such signs and recover expenses reasonably occurred.

Roads Service's response to such illegally erected signage depends on the danger presented to road users. Where Roads Service becomes aware of illegal signage causing an obstruction of the road, or obstructing the vision of drivers, it will be removed immediately.

Roads Service undertakes routine 'sweeps' of all main roads to remove illegal signage. The frequency of the 'sweeps' varies, depending on the extent of the problem and traffic volumes. Roads Service also reacts to information received from members of the public and removes illegal signage causing concern. This policy aims to keep main routes generally free of illegal advertisements.

Flags and emblems erected on public roads must be handled very sensitively – particularly in certain areas. Roads Service's experience has been that without the near-unanimous support of the local community, work

carried out to remove flags and emblems can prove nugatory, with items removed often being quickly replaced, sometimes in greater numbers.

Roads Service has signed up to the Multi Agency Protocol, arising from 'A Shared Future' – the policy and strategic framework for good relations in the North. This protocol, which was published on 4 April 2005, addresses the issue of the display of flags and emblems in public areas. The aim of the protocol is to provide a pro-active approach, with support from communities and their representatives, to address the removal of flags and emblems from arterial routes, town centres and from particular locations, such as interface areas or near schools, hospitals and churches.

When inter agency consultation is required by the protocol, the Agency that is in the most effective position to consult, negotiate or resolve the situation will take the lead, with the PSNI assuming this responsibility where appropriate. The PSNI also takes the lead where the display of any flags or emblems is causing tension, or having a detrimental effect on the quality of life in a community.

Under the protocol, Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached on their removal, particularly if their location proves to be inaccessible to members of the community concerned. In doing so, Roads Service officials have to take account of the possible risk to their workers.

With regard to your reference to the recently erected symbols on lamp standards in Counties Tyrone and Armagh, I am advised that Roads Service officials are not aware of these, but it is hoped that the explanation given above addresses the issue.

Road Maintenance Allocations

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to increase the budgets allocated to companies that hold road maintenance contracts for work to be carried out over the next 5 years, to reflect the rise in running costs such as fuel, and the cost of raw materials.
(AQW 5371/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Budget announced on 22 January 2008 sets out the road maintenance allocations for the 3-year period 2008-11 and these reflect changes in the overall economic outlook. In this context there are no plans to increase budgets. However, you may be interested to note that the term contracts for road maintenance which are operated over a 3 - 5 year period have Price Fluctuation Factors built in to cater for any variations in contractors' costs during the contract period.

Traffic Calming Measures in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the traffic calming measures that have been put in place in the North Down constituency. (AQW 6759/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of the locations, the type of features used and the year in which measures were introduced, as part of my Department's Roads Service's traffic calming programme of works for the North Down Borough Council area over the past 5 years, are provided in the table below.

TRAFFIC CALMING SCHEMES FOR NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR 2003/2004 – 2007/2008

Location	Type of features	Year
	No measures introduced.	2003/2004
Ballycrochan Road, Bangor, Stage 1	Central islands, speed cushions, cycle by-passes, road humps and cycle lanes.	2004/2005
Ballycrochan Road, Bangor, Stage 2	Central hatched area with right turn pockets and cycle lanes.	2004/2005
Crawfordsburn Village	Village gateway treatment with enhanced signs and red surfacing.	2004/2005
Bloomfield Road South, Bangor	Central islands, hatching and speed cushions.	2004/2005
High Bangor Road, Donaghadee	Enhanced gateway/speed limit signage/improved road markings with red texture surfacing.	2004/2005
Moat Street, Donaghadee	Enhanced signage and road markings with red textured surfacing.	2004/2005
Prospect Road, Bangor	Road humps.	2005/2006
Godfrey Avenue Area, Bangor	Raised junctions.	2005/2006
Conlig Village	Village gateway treatment with enhanced signs, red surfacing and road humps.	2005/2006
Ballycrochan Road, Bangor, Stage 1	Revised scheme layout.	2005/2006
Clandeboyne Road, Bangor	Reduction in available carriageway width by providing dedicated right turning lanes and pedestrian island.	2006/2007
Cranley Road, Bangor	Road humps.	2006/2007
Downshire Road, Holywood	Road hump.	2006/2007

Location	Type of features	Year
Rathmore Road	Road humps and mini-roundabout.	2007/2008
Ballyholme Road	Road humps, formalised parking and pinch points.	2007/2008
Victoria Road/ Clifton Road area	Road hump.	2007/2008
Broadway, Bangor	Road humps and priority junctions.	2007/2008
Killaughey Road, Donaghadee	Enhanced gateway/speed limit signage, improved road markings included red texture surfacing. New enhanced signage was also provided at all schools along these routes.	2007/2008
Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee	Enhanced gateway/speed limit signage, improved road markings included red texture surfacing. New enhanced signage was also provided at all schools along these routes.	2007/2008
Warren Road, Donaghadee		2007/2008
Stockbridge Road, Donaghadee		2007/2008
Millisle Road, Donaghadee		2007/2008

Translink Buses

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of Translink buses that meet the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 provisions for assisting seamless journeys for wheelchair users. (AQW 6783/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: All Translink buses comply with relevant statutory regulations. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 does not make provision to assist wheelchair users access buses. However, Translink has advised me that 210 Metro buses (approximately 78% of the total Metro fleet) and 669 Ulsterbuses (approximately 54% of the total Ulsterbus fleet) currently meet the wheelchair accessibility requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as outlined in the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. I understand that Translink intends that all its buses should be fully compliant with the 1995 Act by the end of the Regional Transportation Strategy period in 2012.

Passing Bays on the Carrowclare Road

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's plans to provide passing bays on the Carrowclare Road, Myroe. (AQW 6784/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

My Department's Roads Service has advised that Carrowclare Road is a rural road, with a very light volume of traffic, where there is some evidence of verge overriding. There are no plans to provide passing bays.

I recognise the cultural, historic and linguistic importance of townland names and given their local significance, it may be more appropriate for townland names to be included on signs that are provided by local councils. A number of local councils, including Derry City Council, are already adopting this approach.

Townland Names

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to reinstate townland names on road signs. (AQW 6795/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, for the purposes of traffic signing, townlands are not considered to be destinations in their own right. Therefore, Roads Service has no plans to include them on traffic signs.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in his Department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6825/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is shown in the following tables.

STAFF ABSENCES DUE TO STRESS: DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Grade (and analogous)	2003/04							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Grade 5 and above								1
Grade 6					1			
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal	2			1		1		3
Staff Officer	3		2		1	1	1	11
Executive Officer 1	3		2	1	2		1	8
Executive Officer 2	3			1	1		1	2
Admin. Officer	9	5	6	1		4	1	12
Admin. Assistant	2	1	3		2	1		6
Industrial	5	5	2	1	4	3	1	9
Total	27	11	15	5	11	10	5	52

Grade (and analogous)	2004/05							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Grade 5 and above								
Grade 6								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal	2							3
Staff Officer	1	1			2			7
Executive Officer 1			1		3	1	2	1

Grade (and analogous)	2004/05							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Executive Officer 2	2							3
Admin. Officer	6	1	2		2			9
Admin. Assistant		1			2	1		9
Industrial	4	2			1		2	9
Total	15	5	3		10	2	4	41

Grade (and analogous)	2005/06							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Grade 5 and above		1						
Grade 6								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal	1				1			1
Staff Officer	2		2			1	1	6
Executive Officer 1	2	1	2	1	1		1	8
Executive Officer 2	1							1
Admin. Officer	6	2	1		1			4
Admin. Assistant	3	2	1		1	1		4
Industrial	3		2		2		1	11
Total	18	6	8	1	6	2	3	35

Grade (and analogous)	2006/07							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Grade 5 and above								
Grade 6								
Grade 7								1
Deputy Principal	1	1						4
Staff Officer	1	2				1		4
Executive Officer 1	3	0	3	2	3	1	2	6
Executive Officer 2	2	2	1	1			1	4
Admin. Officer	3	2			3	1	1	7
Admin. Assistant	3	3		1	1	2		6
Industrial	7	1	1	1	1	1	2	7
Total	20	11	5	5	8	6	6	39

Grade (and analogous)	2007/08*							
	Number of days exceeded							
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Grade 5 and above								
Grade 6								
Grade 7								
Deputy Principal								1
Staff Officer	3	1				2		3
Executive Officer 1	2		3		1			6
Executive Officer 2	1	1	1					2
Admin. Officer	1		1		1			7
Admin. Assistant	5		2		1			6
Industrial	1	3		2	1	1	1	5
Total	13	5	7	2	4	3	1	30

* Excludes staff in Northern Ireland Water.

Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry Service

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the tendering process undertaken prior to the awarding of the contract for the Ballycastle to Rathlin ferry service; (ii) the number of firms that applied for the contract; and (iii) the grounds on which the successful firm was chosen. (AQW 6852/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: A tender competition (S1417305) for the Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry service was advertised on 14 May 2007 but discontinued by the evaluation panel on 28 November 2007 on the grounds of affordability and non-compliance with the specification.

The competition was re-tendered as an open competition under Part B Services of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006, and Amended Regulations 2007. This competition was advertised on the Central Procurement Directorate's website on 7 January 2008.

Three companies submitted tenders by the closing date of Thursday, 28 February 2008.

Upon evaluation, two companies were assessed as having made compliant bids. The successful firm was chosen on the basis that it had achieved the higher score against an evaluation scoring frame. The elements evaluated were:

- service levels for passengers, cars, freight, livestock and hazardous goods;
- vessels, including relief, emergency services, disabled access, ship boarding practices, port assets, compliance with regulations;

- timetables, performance regime and ticketing;
- unscheduled events, integrated transport, consultation, marketing and website; and
- subsidy required.

Water and Roads Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what work is scheduled by (i) the Roads Service; and (ii) Northern Ireland Water, in 2008 in (a) Ballycastle; (b) Ballymena; and (c) Ballymoney; and what are the proposed start and completion dates for each of these. (AQW 6856/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 6856/08, schemes scheduled by my Department's Roads Service in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney in 2008 are listed in the table below. A formal programme has yet to be agreed with contractors, however an indication of the likely timescale is provided.

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/Completion
(a) Ballycastle	None.	N/A
(b) Ballymena		
Linenhall Street/ Bridge Street	Traffic Management – Improvements to lane destinations and pedestrian routes.	Autumn 2008

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/ Completion
Town Centre	Car parking – continued upgrade of multi-storey car park.	May/June 2008
Ballee Park and Share Car Park	Park and Share car park – extension.	Autumn 2008
Circular Road	Resurfacing of carriageway.	Summer 2008
(c) Ballymoney		
The Meadows	Drainage Improvements.	March 2009
Portrush Road	Pedestrian Measures – pedestrian refuge.	Autumn 2008
Queen Street near Rodeing Foot	Pedestrian Measures – Pelican Crossing.	Autumn 2008
Knock Road to Semicock Road	Cycle Measures – completion of route along by-pass.	Scheme Complete

In addition, structural maintenance works to carriageways and footways resurfacing or surface treatment will be carried out, at various locations in all three towns, from May to September 2008.

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water of projects scheduled in the 2008 in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney. These are listed in the table below:-

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/ Completion
(a) Ballycastle		
Portballintrae	Watermains improvements.	January-October 2008
Ballycastle	Sewerage Improvements.	March-November 2008
Parkmore	Service Reservoir Improvements.	December 2007-February 2008
Priestland Road, Bushmills	Sewer Extension.	May-July 2008
Rathlin Island	Water Supply Improvements.	December 2007-February 2008
Bushmills and Portballintrae	Wastewater Treatment Works Upgrade.	December 2008-June 2010
(b) Ballymena		
Oaklands	Rationalisation between Quoile Dam and Dungonnell Water Treatment Works.	November 2008-August 2009

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/ Completion
Cashelton	Watermain Improvements.	April 2008-January 2009
(c) Ballymoney		
Altnahinch	Watermain Improvements.	May 2007-January 2008
Rasharkin	Watermain Improvements.	January-August 2008
Loughguile	Watermain Improvements.	January-October 2008
Ballynahone	Watermain Improvements.	January-October 2008
Ballymoney	Sewerage Improvements.	July 2004-August 2008
Rasharkin	Flood Alleviation and Sewer Extension.	March-November 2008
Finvoy Road, Ballymoney	Sewerage Scheme.	October 2007-March 2008
Frosses Road, Ballymoney	Foul Sewer Extension.	February-March 2008
Castlecatt Road, Dervock	New Storm Sewer.	June-September 2008
Station Road, Dervock	First time Services.	September-October 2008
Craigs Road, Rasharkin	Foul Sewer extension.	June-October 2008

With regard to AQW 6857/08, traffic calming measures carried out by my Department's Roads Service in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney over the last three years are listed in the table below:-

Scheme	Details	Period over which work completed.
(i) Ballycastle		
	None.	N/A
(ii) Ballymena		
Chichester Park area	Area wide scheme.	2005/2006
Warden Street/ Suffolk Street/ Fisherwick	Area wide scheme.	2005/2006
Doury Road Estate/ Glendun Park/ Sandown Park/ Kensington Park	Completion of scheme commenced in previous year.	
Mill Street/ Wellington Street	Part of town centre upgrade.	2006/2007
Ballykeel 1/ Ballykeel 2 and Crebilly Road	Area wide scheme.	2007/2008

Scheme	Details	Period over which work completed.
Wellington Street	Continuation of previous works.	2007/2008
(iii) Ballymoney		
Eastermeade/ North Road	Traffic Calming.	Summer 2008
Castlehill Drive/ Castlehill Avenue and Cloneen Drive	Traffic Calming.	2007/2008

In addition, Roads Service proposes to carry out a traffic calming scheme on Broughshane Street, Ballymena, early in 2009, to continue the general upgrade of the town centre.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures have been put in place in (i) Ballycastle; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Ballymoney, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6857/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 6856/08, schemes scheduled by my Department's Roads Service in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney in 2008 are listed in the table below. A formal programme has yet to be agreed with contractors, however an indication of the likely timescale is provided.

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/Completion
(a) Ballycastle	None.	N/A
(b) Ballymena		
Linenhall Street/ Bridge Street	Traffic Management – Improvements to lane destinations and pedestrian routes.	Autumn 2008
Town Centre	Car parking – continued upgrade of multi-storey car park.	May/June 2008
Ballee Park and Share Car Park	Park and Share car park – extension.	Autumn 2008
Circular Road	Resurfacing of carriageway.	Summer 2008
(c) Ballymoney		
The Meadows	Drainage Improvements.	March 2009

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/Completion
Portrush Road	Pedestrian Measures – pedestrian refuge.	Autumn 2008
Queen Street near Rodeing Foot	Pedestrian Measures – Pelican Crossing.	Autumn 2008
Knock Road to Semicock Road	Cycle Measures – completion of route along by-pass.	Scheme Complete

In addition, structural maintenance works to carriageways and footways resurfacing or surface treatment will be carried out, at various locations in all three towns, from May to September 2008.

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water of projects scheduled in the 2008 in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney. These are listed in the table below:-

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/Completion
(a) Ballycastle		
Portballintrae	Watermains improvements.	January-October 2008
Ballycastle	Sewerage Improvements.	March-November 2008
Parkmore	Service Reservoir Improvements.	December 2007-February 2008
Priestland Road, Bushmills	Sewer Extension.	May-July 2008
Rathlin Island	Water Supply Improvements.	December 2007-February 2008
Bushmills and Portballintrae	Wastewater Treatment Works Upgrade.	December 2008-June 2010
(b) Ballymena		
Oaklands	Rationalisation between Quoile Dam and Dungonnell Water Treatment Works.	November 2008-August 2009
Cashelton	Watermain Improvements.	April 2008-January 2009
(c) Ballymoney		
Altnahinch	Watermain Improvements.	May 2007-January 2008
Rasharkin	Watermain Improvements.	January-August 2008
Loughguile	Watermain Improvements.	January-October 2008
Ballynahone	Watermain Improvements.	January-October 2008

Scheme	Details	Proposed Start/Completion
Ballymoney	Sewerage Improvements.	July 2004-August 2008
Rasharkin	Flood Alleviation and Sewer Extension.	March-November 2008
Finvoy Road, Ballymoney	Sewerage Scheme.	October 2007-March 2008
Frosses Road, Ballymoney	Foul Sewer Extension.	February-March 2008
Castlecatt Road, Dervock	New Storm Sewer.	June-September 2008
Station Road, Dervock	First time Services.	September-October 2008
Craigs Road, Rasharkin	Foul Sewer extension.	June-October 2008

With regard to AQW 6857/08, traffic calming measures carried out by my Department's Roads Service in Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney over the last three years are listed in the table below:-

Scheme	Details	Period over which work completed.
(i) Ballycastle	None.	N/A
(ii) Ballymena		
Chichester Park area	Area wide scheme.	2005/2006
Warden Street/ Suffolk Street/ Fisherwick	Area wide scheme.	2005/2006
Doury Road Estate/ Glendun Park/ Sandown Park/ Kensington Park	Completion of scheme commenced in previous year.	
Mill Street/ Wellington Street	Part of town centre upgrade.	2006/2007
Ballykeel 1/ Ballykeel 2 and Crebilly Road	Area wide scheme.	2007/2008
Wellington Street	Continuation of previous works.	2007/2008
(iii) Ballymoney		
Eastermeade/North Road	Traffic Calming.	Summer 2008
Castlehill Drive/ Castlehill Avenue and Cloneen Drive	Traffic Calming.	2007/2008

In addition, Roads Service proposes to carry out a traffic calming scheme on Broughshane Street, Ballymena, early in 2009, to continue the general upgrade of the town centre.

Ulsterbus

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have used Ulsterbus services in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 6872/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information is not available in the format requested. Translink records the number of trips undertaken rather than the number of passengers. The number of passenger trips provided by Ulsterbus for the last five years is as follows:-

2003/2004	45,900,512
2004/2005	45,192,417
2005/2006	43,408,115
2006/2007	43,381,759
2007/2008	43,880,054

The introduction of Metro in February 2005 affected Ulsterbus numbers as it extended the old Citybus routes to include some areas previously covered by Ulsterbus routes.

Water Meters

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many abandoned or disused water meters there are in the North Down constituency. (AQW 6875/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that all water meters installed on customer supplies are used either for billing purposes or for monitoring purposes to assess demand in a particular area. NIW is not aware of any abandoned or disused water meters in the North Down area.

Signage for Drivers in Fountain Hill, Derry/Londonderry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase signage to inform drivers that Fountain Hill, Derry/Londonderry is not suitable for heavy goods vehicles. (AQW 6882/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Following a number of recent incidents, my Department's Roads Service plans to review the existing signage at Fountain Hill, to establish if it can be made more prominent for drivers of large vehicles.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services his Department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded. (AQW 6906/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The number of contracts for external consultancy services awarded by my Department in each of the last 4 years, excluding its Agencies and sponsored bodies, which did not go out to public tender, is set out in the table below:

Department for Regional Development	
Financial Year	Number of consultancy contracts awarded, which did not go out to public tender
2004/05	6
2005/06	7
2006/07	5
2007/08	Nil

A brief description of the contracts, their value and to whom they were awarded is set out below:

Department for Regional Development			
Financial Year	Contract Description	Contract Value £	Consultant
2004-05	Modern Collaborative Office Environment	10,000	Microsoft
	Advice on airport issues	20,000	Avia Solutions
	Technical Advice on City of Derry Airport	15,000	Babtie Group Ltd
	Legal Advice on City of Derry Airport and Rathlin Ferry issues	45,000	McGrigor Donald
	Advice on air route development	10,000	Prof. Brian Graham
	Review of Legislative Timetable/expertise on Water Industry Act	30,000	John Comber
2005-06	Bangor Relay	5,455	CAL
	Bangor Relay	210	J Barnett
	Legal Advice on City of Derry Airport – state Aid application	999	McGrigor Donald

Department for Regional Development			
Financial Year	Contract Description	Contract Value £	Consultant
2005-06	EU Project assessment	766	Professor Julian Hine
	Accessibility Analysis	5,775	TAS Partnership Ltd
	Provision of advice on regulation of Water industry	5,698	OFWAT
	Programme Management WRSG strategy	11,264	E-Change Training
2006-07	.Net Developers	33,510	Microsoft
	Review of timing of software issues for smartpass	913	MVA Consultancy
	Quality assurance on review of DRD's noise monitoring scheme at Belfast City Airport	5,000	Prof. Callum Thomas
	Update of Retail Study	19,000	Roger Tyms & Partners
	Communications Brand Audit	10,000	Promise

Road Safety Measures in Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what road safety measures are planned for the Millisle area over the next 3 years. (AQW 6946/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: An official from my Department's Roads Service presents and discusses an annual programme of proposed works with each council at bi-annual meetings. Proposed road safety measures are generally prepared on a one year programme, while traffic calming schemes have a two year programme.

The following schemes are listed as part of the Ards Borough Council 2008/09 programme for Millisle and Donaghadee:

Location	Road Safety Feature
Abbey Road and Moss Road, Millisle.	Traffic Calming.
Abbey Road, Millisle.	Footway link to Abbey Villa football ground.
Moss Road, Millisle.	Bus stop hard standing.
High Street, Donaghadee.	Pedestrian crossing.

Roads Service will also consider requests from members of the public and elected representatives for other road safety features, raised throughout the year. Pending the outcome of the assessment of such requests, their relative priority and the available resources, schemes may be added to the programme as the year progresses, or programmed for future years.

There are currently no further road safety measures proposed in Millisle or Donaghadee areas for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 years.

Road Safety Measures in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what road safety measures are planned for the Donaghadee area over the next 3 years.

(AQW 6951/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: An official from my Department's Roads Service presents and discusses an annual programme of proposed works with each council at bi-annual meetings. Proposed road safety measures are generally prepared on a one year programme, while traffic calming schemes have a two year programme.

The following schemes are listed as part of the Ards Borough Council 2008/09 programme for Millisle and Donaghadee:

Location	Road Safety Feature
Abbey Road and Moss Road, Millisle.	Traffic Calming.
Abbey Road, Millisle.	Footway link to Abbey Villa football ground.
Moss Road, Millisle.	Bus stop hard standing.
High Street, Donaghadee.	Pedestrian crossing.

Roads Service will also consider requests from members of the public and elected representatives for other road safety features, raised throughout the year. Pending the outcome of the assessment of such requests, their relative priority and the available resources, schemes may be added to the programme as the year progresses, or programmed for future years.

There are currently no further road safety measures proposed in Millisle or Donaghadee areas for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 years.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many working days were lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months.

(AQW 6984/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is set out in the following table. Given that there are numerous conditions which may or may not be stress-related, details are restricted to those absences which have been specifically declared and recorded as being due to stress.

NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS LOST DUE TO STRESS*

April 2006	184	April 2007	145
May 2006	196	May 2007	71
June 2006	183	June 2007	112
July 2006	301	July 2007	153
August 2006	304	August 2007	124
September 2006	260	September 2007	125
October 2006	321	October 2007	205
November 2006	286	November 2007	195
December 2006	234	December 2007	209
January 2007	290	January 2008	157
February 2007	255	February 2008	101
March 2007	272	March 2008	105

* Figures from April 2007 onwards exclude staff in Northern Ireland Water.

A2 Road Widening Schemes

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update in relation to the A2 road widening scheme, between Seapark, Carrickfergus, and Newtownabbey. (AQW 7048/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As I advised in answer to your recent Oral Question (AQO 2180/08) on this issue, my Department's Roads Service held a public inquiry in October 2007 into their proposals for a major works scheme on the A2 at Shore Road, Greenisland. The Inspectors have produced their report on the inquiry and forwarded this to Roads Service on 22 January 2008. Roads Service is currently considering its contents and recommendations, before a Departmental Statement is provided on the scheme. This is likely to take several months to complete. As there are a number of internal consultation processes to be carried out prior to publication, including ratification by the Regional Development Committee, a realistic time frame for this publication would be in the autumn of this year.

Subject to a satisfactory outcome to the public inquiry process, the scheme would then progress through further development stages. These would include completion of the statutory process by making the statutory orders, completion of detailed design,

and economic appraisal. Following satisfactory completion of these and, subject to the availability of finance, the scheme would then advance to procurement. My Department's Investment Delivery Plan for Roads (published in April 2008), indicates that the anticipated date of advertisement to market for the scheme would be 2010/11, with estimated completion /delivery in 2012/13.

Blue Badges for the Disabled

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6360/08, how many people possess disabled 'blue badges' in each council area. (AQW 7053/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain information on Blue Badges by district council area. However, I can advise that as at the 15 May 2008, the total number of valid Blue Badges was 91,700.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Disabled Access in Victoria Square

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the access facilities available around Victoria Square for persons with disabilities; and to outline problems encountered since it was opened. (AQW 5853/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): Information in relation to access facilities rests with the new owner of Victoria Square, Commerz Grundbesitz Investmentgesellschaft (CGI). I have asked the Victoria Square Centre Management Team for a reply to this question and have placed its answer in the library.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the funding allocated to the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association for 2008-2009; (ii) the number of applications made for co-ownership funding to date; and (iii) the total value of those applications. (AQW 6651/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) started this year with a grant of £15 million. NICHHA will use the £15 million grant along with external finance to achieve the Programme for

Government target of assisting 500 applicants this year.

The table below shows the NICHHA applications up to week ending 23 May 2008

	Number	Value £m	DSD Housing Association Grant £m
Completed / Contractually Committed	281	22.4	15.0

There are 258 applications still to be considered.

Housing Executive

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people with disabilities who are Housing Executive tenants and currently waiting to have special adaptations to their homes. (AQW 6811/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At 12 May 2008, 653 major adaptations were in the system awaiting completion. Of these 539 referrals had been made to the Occupational Therapist Service. At the same date the total number of minor adaptation cases issued to contractors and awaiting completion was 941, and there were 357 cases waiting to be processed.

Housing Waiting Lists

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of people on the housing waiting list for North Belfast in total, and broken down by the type of accommodation requested (e.g family home, bungalow); and (ii) how she will meet these needs. (AQW 6812/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At September 2007, a total of 2,457 applicants were on the waiting list for North Belfast. The type of accommodation required is broken down by the household grouping as shown below:

Elderly	327
Large Adult	30
Large Family	112
Singles	1,196
Small Adult	125
Small Family	667

Housing need will be met through social housing re-lets and new homes provided through the Social Housing Development Programme.

Departmental Land

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) by geographical area, vacant land owned by the Department in Belfast; and (ii) how

she intends to develop this land to address the housing crisis in Belfast. (AQW 6813/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have arranged to place a copy of a schedule of the Department's land in the Assembly Library. The vacant land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Belfast and the plans to use it to address housing need in Belfast are set out in the following table:

	Location	Site Area (HA)	Transfer to Housing Assoc	Transfer to Surplus Land Schedule	Retain for future development	Comments
West Belfast	Hannahstown Hill Site 2	4.02	√			Site to be transferred to Fold HA 2008/09
West Belfast	Hannahstown Hill Site 1	3.23			√	Use subject to BMAP Enquiry
West Belfast	Distillery St/ Blackwater	0.42	√			Site to be transferred to to Habinteg HA 2008/09
East Belfast	Knocknagoney	5.76			√	Planning & feasibility study
West Belfast	249 Springfield Rd	0.01		√		
West Belfast	131 Springfield Rd	0.07			√	Zoned for housing
West Belfast	2E Lower Clonard St	0.01			√	Garage - Proposed transfer site.
South Belfast	Hatfield Street	0.03	√			Site to be transferred to Clanmil HA 2008/09
South Belfast	Bankmore St Carparks	0.44		√		Reserved for Road Service.
South Belfast	Cromac Street	0.31		√		Reserved for Roads Service
South Belfast	Posnett Street	0.80			√	Mixed use commercial development / social housing site
South Belfast	Pakenham Street	0.08		√		PSNI notice preventing sale
South Belfast	Charter Youth Club	0.04	√			Site to be transferred to Ulidia HA 2008/09
South Belfast	Hope Street	2.00		√		
South Belfast	Stewart St Boiler House	0.13	√			Site to be transferred to Clanmil HA 2008/09
South Belfast	Roden Street Phase 2	0.56	√			Site to be transferred to Fold HA 2008/09
North Belfast	St Patricks School	0.51	√			Site to be transferred to Habinteg 2008/09
North Belfast	Antrim Road: Coulter's 2	0.13	√			For transfer 2009/10
North Belfast	Stanhope St/ Regent St	0.18			√	Possible future HA transfer site
North Belfast	Gainsborough Infill	0.05	√			Site for transfer 2009/10
North Belfast	Mount Vernon Walk	0.39			√	Pending transfer to Council

	Location	Site Area (HA)	Transfer to Housing Assoc	Transfer to Surplus Land Schedule	Retain for future development	Comments
Shankill	Malvern Close	0.46			√	Pending Lower Shankill Strategy
Shankill	Forthriver Way/Road	0.13			√	Pending Lower Shankill Strategy
North Belfast	Alliance Avenue	0.09	√			Site for transfer 2010/2011
North Belfast	Cliftonpark Ave A & B	1.95			√	To be included in Girdwood Plans
North Belfast	Cliftonpark Ave/ Crumlin	0.50		√		Sale held pending issue of DSD Masterplan for Girdwood
North Belfast	76-78 Ligoniel Road	0.30		√		Held pending completion of adjoining developments

Fuel Prices

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the strategy being put in place to ensure the long term ability of people to heat their homes, given the recent and likely future rises in fuel prices. (AQW 6815/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Executive has policies in place to deal with energy efficiency and to tackle fuel poverty over the longer term. To deal with the short-term issue of rises in fuel prices, I have focused work across Government and the wider energy sector into a Taskforce on fuel poverty. The Taskforce will report back to me later this summer and it is my intention to secure Executive support for a package of measures to help those people in greatest need during the winter.

Fuel Prices

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the impact of recent fuel prices on fuel poverty, the increase in the numbers of people in fuel poverty over the last year, and an estimate of the costs

of meeting fuel poverty targets given projected fuel cost increases over the coming year. (AQW 6816/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The ever increasing cost of fuel, which is almost entirely outside of Government control, has severely impacted my Department's progress towards meeting the targets set out in the 'Ending Fuel Poverty' strategy. The 2006 House Condition Survey will confirm that 34% of people are now in fuel poverty. To help alleviate this problem I have increased my Department's spending on fuel poverty to £35.4 million this year and I will bid for additional resources where opportunities arise.

Departmental Land

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the North Down parliamentary constituency; and (ii) her plans for this land. (AQW 6817/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information for North Down parliamentary constituency is not readily available. However, the following table sets out the position on land in the greater Bangor and parts of Newtownards areas:

District	Location	Area (HA)	To be Transferred to Housing Association	Placed on the Surplus Land Schedule	To be Retained for future use	Comments
Bangor	Old Belfast Road	0.23		√		
Bangor	South Circular Road	1.20	√			Transfer to Clanmil 2009/10
Bangor	Rathgill, Bangor	9.34			√	Pending planning feasibility study.
Bangor	Churchill Park, Bangor	0.45		√		

District	Location	Area (HA)	To be Transferred to Housing Association	Placed on the Surplus Land Schedule	To be Retained for future use	Comments
Bangor	Loughview Avenue	0.28			√	Pending planning feasibility study.
Bangor	Church Green, Hollywood	0.03		√		
Bangor	Ava Street	0.11			√	Proposed short term lease to Community Association.
Bangor	Drumhirk Drive	0.15			√	
Bangor	Rathgill Zone Phase 1	0.85	√			Transfer to BIH 2009/10
Bangor	Strand Avenue, Hollywood	0.10	√			Transfer to Trinity HA 2009/10
Bangor	Green Rd / Breezemount	0.38		√		Surplus per Breezemount Strategy
Bangor	230 Ballycrochan Road	0.15		√		
N'ards	Holly Pk Rd, Killinchy	0.64		√		Within green belt & PPS14 applies
N'ards	Main Street, Greyabbey	0.06		√		
N'ards	Cypress Pk 1 & 2, D'Dee	0.34		√		
N'ards	Parsonage / Rectory, Kircubbin	2.96			√	Pending planning feasibility study.
N'ards	Cuan Avenue, Portaferry	0.27		√		
N'ards	Moat Road, Ballyhalbert	0.34			√	Dropped from 5 year SHDP
N'ards	Main Street, Carrowdore	0.43			√	Possible rural pilot
N'ards	Steel Dickson Gdns, P'ferry	0.44			√	Feasibility study to be carried out.
N'ards	Greenwood Avenue	0.20			√	Pending planning feasibility study.
N'ards	Beechfield Drive	0.40			√	Possible concept plan required
N'ards	North Street, Greyabbey	0.15		√		
N'ards	Lawson Park, P'vogie	0.19			√	Pending planning feasibility study.
N'ards	Fir Drive /Glenbrook	0.09	√			NIHE marker site for transfer 09/10
N'ards	Loughries, Ballywattico	0.23		√		
N'ards	Armstrong Avenue 1 & 2	0.12			√	P&F feasibility needed per Area Pl
N'ards	Kathleen Drive	0.07		√		

District	Location	Area (HA)	To be Transferred to Housing Association	Placed on the Surplus Land Schedule	To be Retained for future use	Comments
N'ards	Belheim Drive Site A	1.90			√	Pending planning feasibility Study.
N'ards	Glenbrook Rd Site 1	0.17		√		CXBC approval to sell 10.07.07
N'ards	Glenbrook Rd Site 2	0.30			√	Proposed future transfer site
N'ards	Ashfield Drive, D'dee	0.02		√		
N'ards	Manse Road, Carrowdore	0.40		√		
N'ards	51 Old Newtownards Rd	0.39			√	Pending economic appraisal

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, the number of staff in her Department that were absent due to stress for more than (i) 5 days; (ii) 10 days; (iii) 15 days; (iv) 20 days; (v) 25 days; (vi) 30 days; (vii) 35 days; and (viii) 40 days, broken down by grade. (AQW 6826/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have placed in the library the information requested, contained in tables for each of the 5 years from 2003/2004 to 2007/08. This information has been provided using data from the NICS Human Resource Management System (HRMS).

Community Support Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development why there has been a delay in processing letters of offer to district councils in relation to Citizens Advice Bureaux. (AQW 6859/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Community Support Programme operates across NI and is a joint programme between DSD and Local Councils. DSD contribution to the programme for 2008/2009 is £5m.

The letters of offer for the Community Support Programme for the period 2008/2009 could not be issued until the budget position for this programme and others within the Voluntary and Community Unit had been considered in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The letters of offer were issued to all Local Councils on 13 May 2008. This is in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Councils

and DSD for this programme which sets a deadline of the end of June each year to notify the Councils of the Department's allocation to the programme.

Alley Gating

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development what process is required for 'Alley Gating' to be undertaken. (AQW 6929/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does not have responsibility for Alley Gating. In partnership with others, we have however been involved in helping local people explore the potential of such schemes and, on occasion, we have provided support to implement them.

Some Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans have included the erection of alley gates as a priority issue. Where this is the case, my officials will work with the relevant statutory bodies and other interests to consider how the issue might be handled.

Finally, my Department has not received an application for funding Alley Gating in the Coolshan Estate in Limavady.

Alley Gating

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if she is considering a fast track process for 'Alley Gating' applications. (AQW 6932/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does not have responsibility for Alley Gating. In partnership with others, we have however been involved in helping local people explore the potential of such schemes and, on occasion, we have provided support to implement them.

Some Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans have included the erection of alley gates as a priority issue. Where this is the case, my officials will work with the relevant statutory bodies and other interests to consider how the issue might be handled.

Finally, my Department has not received an application for funding Alley Gating in the Coolessan Estate in Limavady.

Alley Gating

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how long it will take until the 'Alley Gating' request for the Coolessan Estate, Limavady, will be completed. (AQW 6936/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does not have responsibility for Alley Gating. In partnership with others, we have however been involved in helping local people explore the potential of such schemes and, on occasion, we have provided support to implement them.

Some Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans have included the erection of alley gates as a priority issue. Where this is the case, my officials will work with the relevant statutory bodies and other interests to consider how the issue might be handled.

Finally, my Department has not received an application for funding Alley Gating in the Coolessan Estate in Limavady.

Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development when she expects work will commence on Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in Limavady, and when this work will be completed. (AQW 6937/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is currently planning to start work in the early part of the 2009-2010 financial year. The scheme will be undertaken in 3 consecutive phases with each lasting approximately 18 months.

Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the reasons why she has yet to visit the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. (AQW 6948/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Pressure on my diary is the only reason why I have not yet

visited Beechfield but I will honour my promise to visit the estate at the earliest opportunity.

Housing Executive Tenants

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have had their open fires removed and replaced by oil-fired central heating in each of the last three years. (AQW 6961/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not readily available in the format requested. The number of Housing Executive tenants who have had their open fires replaced by oil fired, or natural gas central heating, for each of the last three years is as follows:

- 2005/06 - 797 tenants
- 2006/07 - 622 tenants
- 2007/08 - 962 tenants

These figures reflect replacements undertaken in the Heating Replacement Programme and do not include changes due to multi-element improvement schemes or adaptations for disabled persons.

Hostel Accommodation in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4867/08, what steps she is taking to provide extra hostel placements in the Ards area. (AQW 6962/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are no plans for additional hostel accommodation in the Newtownards area. However, it is planned to provide a further three private sector properties for temporary accommodation.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications for the Co-ownership Scheme are currently being considered by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association. (AQW 6980/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At week ending 16 May 2008 the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association had 258 applications for consideration.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6343/08, to confirm the date on which she was informed of the funding crisis within the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Association Ltd. (AQW 6987/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Following a meeting between senior officers of the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) and senior officials of the Department for Social Development I was advised on 11 March 2008 that NICHHA had substantially committed its 2008/09 budget and was considering closing the scheme to new applications.

Local Community Fund

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 302/08, what progress has been made in relation to the review of the Local Community Fund. (AQW 6988/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Local Community Fund was evaluated during the 2007/08 financial year and, as a result of the review findings, has been extended to 2008/09. Funding contracts, with a total value of £2m, have been issued to sixteen Intermediary Funding Bodies.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm (i) that all applications for the Co-ownership Scheme which were received by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association before 18 March 2008 will be processed by 1 June 2008; and (ii) that funding will be provided for applicants by that date. (AQW 6989/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Responsibility for the administration of the co-ownership scheme rests with the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association. At this time the Association is unable to give a timeframe for processing of applications.

The Association started this financial year with £15 million grant funding from the Department and is in the process of securing private finance. The Association is unable to say at this stage when private funding will become available.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the rent increases introduced

by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association over the last 3 years; and (ii) the date that each was implemented. (AQW 6990/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The percentage increase for 2008/2009 applied to rents by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) was 3.95%. This was implemented at 1 May 2008. No increase was applied to the rents in financial year 2006/2007 and 2007/2008.

Replacement Grants

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many replacement grants have been allocated per parliamentary constituency in each of the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. (AQW 7009/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information requested is not readily available in the format requested. However, the following table details the numbers of Replacement Grants approved, in each of the last 3 financial years, in each of the 26 District Councils.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Antrim	0	1	1	2
Ards	1	2	0	3
Armagh	7	5	9	21
Ballymena	2	1	1	4
Ballymoney	2	0	2	4
Banbridge	7	5	9	21
Belfast	0	1	0	1
Carrickfergus	2	0	0	2
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	2	2	0	4
Cookstown	9	5	3	17
Craigavon	5	6	3	14
Derry	1	7	1	9
Down	6	12	5	23
Dungannon	14	8	9	31
Fermanagh	61	40	39	140
Larne	1	2	2	5
Limavady	4	4	3	11
Lisburn	4	2	2	8
Magherafelt	6	8	6	20
Moyle	2	1	0	3

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Newry and Mourne	13	11	12	36
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0
Omagh	17	8	5	30
Strabane	4	5	4	13
Total	170	136	116	422

Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive Maintenance Budget for the Housing Executive in Ards Borough for each of the years 2006 and 2007; and how much has been allocated for 2008. (AQW 7010/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget for the period requested.

Maintenance Work	Actual Spend		Projected Spend 2008/09 £m
	2006/07 £m	2007/08 £m	
Capital Improvement Work	5.692	2.638	3.013
Planned Maintenance Work	1.720	0.631	0.810
Response Maintenance	1.793	1.909	1.724
Total	9.205	5.178	5.547

Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive Maintenance Budget for Castlereagh Borough for each of the years 2006 and 2007; and how much has been allocated for 2008. (AQW 7011/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget for the period requested.

Maintenance Work	Actual Spend		Projected Spend 2008/09 £m
	2006/07 £m	2007/08 £m	
Capital Improvement Work	4.525	5.206	3.582
Planned Maintenance Work	0.719	1.245	1.351

Maintenance Work	Actual Spend		Projected Spend 2008/09 £m
	2006/07 £m	2007/08 £m	
Response Maintenance	1.755	1.875	1.949
Total	6.999	8.326	6.882

Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive Maintenance Budget for Down Council for each of the years 2006 and 2007; and how much has been allocated for 2008. (AQW 7012/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget for the period requested.

Maintenance Work	Actual Spend		Projected Spend 2008/09 £m
	2006/07 £m	2007/08 £m	
Capital Improvement Work	0.226	0.286	0.246
Planned Maintenance Work	1.362	0.708	0.710
Response Maintenance	1.519	1.539	1.526
Total	3.107	2.533	2.482

Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what financial help is available to people on (i) Income Support; (ii) Incapacity Benefit; and (iii) Disability Living Allowance, in relation to increasing fuel and food costs. (AQW 7032/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Social security benefits, including Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, are normally up-rated in April of each year by the Retail Prices Index. The Retail Price Index takes account of changes in the costs of a wide range of goods and services, including food and fuel. Income Support is up-rated in line with an index based on the Retail Prices Index less housing costs known as the Rossi index. This index reflects the cost of living increases for income-related benefit recipients since housing costs are separately provided for under those benefits.

Other sources of help include:

- The Warm Homes Scheme - a grant scheme which provides a package of energy efficiency and heating measures, up to the value of £850. The Scheme is aimed at householders in the private sector who fall within the eligible groups. The eligible groups include householders of any age who have a child under 16 and are in receipt of Income Support and householders of any age who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.
- Cold Weather Payments provide financial assistance with extra heating costs during spells when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be 0 degrees centigrade over seven consecutive days. Those in receipt of Income Support with a child under the age of 5 are eligible to receive these payments.
- Winter Fuel Payments provide assistance for older people, who may be in receipt of Incapacity Benefit or Disability Living Allowance.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the people entitled to winter fuel payments. (AQW 7033/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Any person over the age of 60 in the qualifying week (which is usually the third week in September) and who is resident in Great Britain or Northern Ireland is entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6444/08, to detail (i) the date on which she was informed that there were insufficient funds to complete all applications for Co-ownership that were registered before the announcement that the scheme was to be suspended; and (ii) the date on which she was informed that the Co-ownership scheme would have to be suspended. (AQW 7036/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I was informed on 11 March 2008 that the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association did not have sufficient funds to complete all applications that had already been made. On this date I was also made aware that the Association had been informed by its advisers that it should process no further applications until its external funding position was clarified.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development what bodies/individuals were consulted by the Co-ownership Housing Association, prior to the decision to suspend the scheme. (AQW 7037/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association is an independent organisation and who it consults is primarily a matter for it. I suggest the member addresses this question directly to the Association.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm whether the £15 million investment in the Co-ownership Scheme, which she announced in March 2008, had already been allocated to existing business submitted to the Co-ownership Housing Association. (AQW 7038/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Up to 12 May 2008 the Department has given the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) almost £8 million grant, for completed applications under the Co-ownership scheme. A further £7m grant, for contractually committed applications for the Co-ownership scheme, will be paid to NICHHA as and when applications are completed.

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on the provision of new Regional Office accommodation for the Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane. (AQW 7080/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency remains committed to the roll-out of a Jobs & Benefits service in Strabane to ensure that clients benefit from the same enhanced work focused service which is available elsewhere in the province. Whilst a planning application was submitted for a new office on the existing site at Urney Road, Strabane, this application was withdrawn in response to an indication that permission would be refused on the basis that insufficient parking was being provided.

A further factor influencing the Jobs & Benefits office accommodation requirement in Strabane is the Social Security Agency's (SSA) Strategic Business Review (SBR) which is examining how best to deliver services to the public in the future. The outcome of this Review will determine whether the Strabane office will provide a Jobs and Benefits service only or if it will also include a (back-office) benefits processing centre. Final decisions as to

the accommodation required in Strabane can not therefore be progressed until the outcome of SBR is known. However, to provide for all eventualities and to ensure that work can commence on site as soon as possible, planning applications are being prepared for consideration by Planning Service for development of a full office including a benefit processing centre and, for delivery of a smaller front line office on the existing site.

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if a private sector bid was chosen to provide Regional Office accommodation for the Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane. (AQW 7081/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency took forward a procurement exercise to identify a replacement site for the new Strabane Jobs & Benefits office and tender documents were issued to prospective bidders. Tenders received were evaluated using a process which included both price and quality assessments. Based on the results of the tender evaluation a decision was taken not to proceed with the tender competition. The results of each tender evaluated are commercial in confidence, however, feedback on individual submissions was provided at the time to the relevant bidders. As a result, the Agency is now exploring options to redevelop the existing site at Urney Road, Strabane.

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development (i) who made the decision to lodge a planning application for the demolition and rebuilding of the existing Social Security Office in Strabane; and (ii) when was this decision made. (AQW 7082/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As no acceptable tenders were received in response to the procurement exercise, the Social Security Agency developed a Contingency Plan for the Strabane Jobs & Benefits office to ensure that clients could benefit from the same enhanced work focused service which is available elsewhere in the province. This Plan identified the redevelopment of the existing site as the only viable option and was approved by the Project's Senior Responsible Owners in January 2007 and approved by the SSA/Department for Employment and Learning Modernisation Board at its meeting in February 2007. The Contingency Plan was communicated to both relevant (at that stage Direct Rule) Ministers in March 2007. A letter was also issued in March 2007 to local representatives outlining the proposed way forward.

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if the Department's original Business Case and costings for the Jobs and Benefits Office project in Strabane were sufficiently robust and achievable in light of a later open book tendered analysis from the private sector. (AQW 7083/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Project team, in conjunction with the then Valuation and Lands Agency, prepared an Economic Appraisal considering the various options for delivery of a new Jobs & Benefits office in Strabane. These options were fully costed to reflect the position as to land and development costs for similar type office development in Strabane and took on board the experience of delivery of the previous 25 Jobs & Benefits offices. The analysis was considered robust providing a sound basis for moving forward with the procurement exercise. In terms of the analysis of tenders, the breakdown of the financial costs were well in excess of the pre-tender estimate. Based on this analysis the project's consultants were unable to recommend that the tenders offered value for money.

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development why the advertised Jobs and Benefits Office project in Strabane appears to have been aborted before any decision was taken and any of the tendering parties informed in writing as to the change to the process. (AQW 7084/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The tender competition was aborted in February 2007 due to the failure to secure an acceptable tender and following the development of a contingency plan which had been agreed with the Project's Senior Responsible Owners. Tenderers were advised in writing of this position on 20 February 2007.

Legislation to Protect Caravan Owners

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if she has discussed with Executive colleagues the idea of bringing forward legislation to protect caravan owners. (AQW 7085/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I refer the Member to the answer I gave in respect of AQW 5513/08.

Redevelopment of the Strabane Jobs and Benefits Agency

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if the proposed redevelopment of the existing Strabane Jobs and Benefits Agency complies exactly with the brief given to the private sector in terms of (i) the Disability Discrimination Act; (ii) timetables; (iii) schedules of accommodation; (iv) escape routes; (v) on-site parking; (vi) quality of building construction; and (vii) sustainability; and whether the private sector was asked to provide a facility of greater specification than a public sector comparative. (AQW 7098/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I can confirm that the proposed redevelopment of the existing site will be to the same standard as the brief contained in the previously issued tender documents and that the private sector was not requested to provide a facility of greater specification.

With reference to the specific areas identified, the standard of the redevelopment will comply with the original specification in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act, which is a statutory requirement; escape routes; quality of building specification; and sustainability.

There will however be differences in terms of on-site parking as the provision of car parking spaces will reflect the stipulated requirements of the Planning Service, including adequate disabled spaces. The number of spaces will be determined by the location of the site, taking account of public car parking facilities and public transport routes.

As to the schedule of accommodation this will be determined by the Social Security Agency's (SSA) Strategic Business Review (SBR) which is examining how best to deliver services to the public in the future. The outcome of this Review will determine whether the Strabane office will provide a Jobs and Benefits service only or if it will also include a (back-office) benefits processing centre. This work also has an impact on the overall timescales for completion of the Strabane office as decisions as to the accommodation required in Strabane can not be progressed until the outcome of SBR is known. Once a decision has been taken on the way forward, it will be necessary to draw up a revised programme to take account of the procurement route, planning permission and any site specific issues associated with the proposed development.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Desks for Back-Bench MLAs

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission to detail the form the proposed desks in the Assembly for back bench MLAs will take. (AQW 6733/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): The proposal to install lecterns / desks for the back benches is primarily to facilitate improvements to the existing audio system and to the heating and ventilation systems. The existing hanging microphones will be removed and replaced by individual microphones and loudspeakers on the new desks.

As well as improving the audio quality for Members, particularly at the back benches, this will allow the existing heating and ventilation systems to be utilised at their maximum capacity, affording the facility to quickly lower / raise the temperature in the chamber if required.

The desks will be a slightly narrower version of the existing Members' desks and will be designed to replicate the existing details. All of the desks, including the existing Members' desks will have ducting installed to provide the necessary infrastructure for potential future improvements in technology such as laptops for Members or electronic voting.

In order to facilitate access for Members on the occasions when the chamber is nearing capacity, the proposal is to install a combination of single and double desks with access by Members to the seating area behind the desks.

In addition to the new desks and carpet, the Commission are taking the opportunity afforded by the refurbishment to make modifications to the Speaker's table area, including the removal of the ballistic screen.

Access to the floor of the chamber will also be improved and an additional four wheelchair spaces will be provided for visitors to the Public Gallery along with a wheelchair hoist and a disabled toilet. The facilities for visitors will be further enhanced by an upgraded audio system and plasma screens in the galleries. The enclosed drawings show the proposed plan layout and a three dimensional visualisation of the chamber.

Symbols and Emblems on Display in the Stormont Assembly Estate

Mr McElduff asked the Assembly Commission to provide an inventory of symbols and emblems on display or in storage in the Stormont Assembly estate. (AQW 6860/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): I have attached for your information a list of all artefacts that are either on display, stored on site or stored at offsite storage. The list also includes paintings, statues, symbols and

emblems that are displayed in Parliament Buildings or in close proximity.

The Assembly Commission only has responsibility for the items that belong to the Northern Ireland Assembly; the additional information in relation to the Estate has been provided by Department of Finance and Personnel's, Estate Management Unit.

There are several classical Greek motifs throughout Parliament Buildings which include; fluted Ionic columns in 'ebonised mahogany' at the window bays in both Chambers; classically detailed ceilings in both Chambers; robust classical inspired carvings in Portland stone on the exterior of the building; motifs in travertine in the Great hall; fibrous plaster cornicing; carved door frames and canopies. The displays show influences of the various contemporary styles of the late 19th Century and early 20th with anthemion abound, scrolls, Greek keys, beads and reels, eggs and darts and elk heads in a neoclassical style.

At the front of the building on allocated days flags are flown. The Northern Ireland Assembly has the following flags; one pair of Union flags; one pair of Union storm flags; one pair of European flags; one pair of Commonwealth flags and a single Old Glory. Internally there are two Commonwealth Parliamentary Association flags on the fireplace within the Commonwealth room.

There are several signposts within the Estate detailing walk ways etc and these along with the entrances into the Estate are owned and maintained by the Department of Finance and Personnel's, Estate Management Unit.

Description	Location
"The Assembly in Session" by Noel Murphy February 2003	Room 41
"The House will divide" by Noel Murphy unveiled 10th February 2003	Senate
The Assembly crest	Room 41
Crystal vase Presented to NIA for the Energy Management Award in 2005	Currently in storage
Didgeridoo, presented to the Assembly from the Aboriginal Ambassador to Europe in November 2001	Currently on display in the library
State opening of N.I Parliament small version by William Conor	Room 41
State opening of N.I. Parliament large version by William Conor	Senate
Reconciliation Monument by Josefina de Vasconcellos. These are also at Berlin, Coventry, and Hiroshima. The sculpture was unveiled in November 2000.	At Massey Avenue close to Parliament Buildings

Description	Location
Oil painting, said to show William III, the Duke of Schomberg and the Pope by Pieter van der Meulen	Speaker's Office
Stone statue of a woman engraved 'Thrift is the gleaner behind all human effort' by John Knox dated 1951	At Massey Avenue
Somme Memorial, large piece of granite with an engraved plaque	At Massey Avenue
Large Granite stone with an inscription in memory of Mo Mowlam	Entrance to children's play park.
Portrait of Rt. Hon JM Andrews by F McKelvey	Artefacts store
Portrait of Rt. Hon, Sir Basil Brooke Bart Prime Minister for N.I 1943-63	On long term loan to Viscount Brookeborough
Portrait of Viscount Craigavon by N Becher	Artefacts store
Portrait of Sir Henry Wilson by HW Gates	Artefacts store
Portrait of Lord Armaghdale by Riviere	Artefacts store
Portrait of Frederick Temple by C Williams	Artefacts store
Portrait of HM the Queen by Lydia de Burgh	On loan to Hillsborough Castle
Oil painting, an Obelisk at the Boyne by J Tudor	Artefacts store
Print of Sydenham Belmont & surrounding area	Artefacts store
Print showing service for Queen Victoria's Jubilee	Artefacts store
Photograph of Queen Victoria	Artefacts store
Print of Irish House of Commons	Room 40
Large framed display of Historic Parliamentary Occasions 1945	Artefacts store
Collection of framed photographs of former Speakers of the NI House of Commons	Artefacts store and Room 41
Framed sealed indenture of Stormont Estate	Artefacts store
Collection of miscellaneous photographs of Parliament Buildings and historic events therein	Artefacts store
Portrait of Mr Seamus Mallon MP by Rita Duffy unveiled 25 March 2003	Members' dining room
Portrait of Lord Alderdice by Carol Graham unveiled on 11 March 2005	Members' dining room
46 Rowel Friers drawings of Members of the Northern Ireland Parliament 1972	Members' coffee lounge
Framed letter from HRH Duke of Edinburgh	Artefacts store
La Baie by Brigitte Coté	Room 41
Canadian Landscape Limited Edition print No 62/80	

Description	Location
Speakers state robes x 2 (both were fire damaged 1 has been restored) and Speakers full bottomed wig in carry case	Artefacts store
Collection of clerks' uniforms and wigs	
Black rod's uniform and sword	
Ceremonial Tabard of Ulster King of Arms	On loan to Hillsborough castle
Coronation vase decorated with the Queen's beasts	Room 3
Japanese officer's sword and covering letter from Earl Mountbatten of Burma	Artefacts store
Bronze bust of Sir Frederick Temple	Artefacts store
Ships bell HMS Ulster in ornamental stand	Artefacts store
Mantle clock by Evill of Bath	Artefacts store
Model of Thiepval memorial tower	Artefacts store
French clock with bronze statue of nobleman	Artefacts store
Red leather dispatch boxes embossed with Royal Arms of Ulster	Senate
Black leather dispatch boxes with Royal Arms of Ulster and cypher of George V	Room 41
2 Jardinaires reputedly made from the timbers of the "Mountjoy" which breached the boom on the river Foyle during the siege of Derry 1689	Artefacts store
Gilded throne	In caged area
"Act of union" table	At off site storage
Maori inkstand	In library
Books containing the names of the civilian war dead	In library
Relief map set in mahogany table, showing the north of Ireland	Off site storage
Miscellaneous collection of souvenirs from meetings of the commonwealth Parliamentary Association (located in the library)	Artefacts store
Cigar lighter presented by the Royal College of Nursing, founders day 1960	Artefacts store
Egg timer silver with crest of NI. Presented by Rt Hon Thomas Moles (first chairman of ways and means) to the House of Commons	Artefacts store
3 x bibles	Artefacts store
Memorial gift a union flag, a picture of Jesus Christ and a picture of "roaring meg" with accompanying letters. Given to the NI Parliament in memory of Senator James Bailie.	Artefacts store

Description	Location
A minton gold crown crested plate. Two coins in presentation frame, commemorating the opening of the NI Parliament, June 1921.	Artefacts store
Collection of a bottle, goblets and saucers in blue pottery.	
A boxed camera and case and various military items.	
Selection of fire damaged items recovered from the parliament buildings fire January 1995 and a set of photographs showing fire damage and repair work in progress	Artefacts Store
Black Rod's Ward of Office ebony with silver gilt mounts with ceremonial lion and bulbous gold scrolling. Presented by the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, First Speaker of the Senate in Northern Ireland	Artefacts store
The Parliament golf handicap challenge cup 1927 silver two-handled trophy dated 1926 and other silverware	Artefacts store
2 sterling Silver Maces	Room 41
Items of Silver Dinner Service	Artefacts store
Statue of Lord Carson, Statue in bronze by L.S Merrifield	Roundabout at top of Prince of Wales
Lord Craigavon's Tomb, Sarcophagus of dressed Portland stone marks the tomb of Lord Craigavon	Upper East Car Park
Cedars, A group of cedars presented in memory of the 36th Ulster Division	Within the Estate
Cedars, Commemorative planting carried out by members of the Royal family in 1951 and 1953	Within the Estate
Irish linen and silk damask decorating the walls in the Senate	Senate
Meeting table from room 21. This table was allegedly used for signing the Belfast Agreement and for the 1st meeting of the Executive	In Storage
Carved inscription in the face of the press balcony balustrade	Commons
Bronze statue of Lord Craigavon, by L.S Merrifield of Chelsea, commissioned in 1938 but due to the war not installed until 1945	Ceremonial Stairs Great Hall
Marble Engravings. To commemorate people who have lost their lives	Commons & Senate Receptions
Balcony Inscription. To record the names of visiting dignitaries and presented to the NIA	Member's Dining Room
Large chandelier, Large chandelier, gift to Royal family from Kaiser Wilhelm	Great Hall
Dedication to DKs, Presented by the Speaker for the Transitional Assembly for outstanding bravery	Great Hall

Description	Location
Plaque, to acknowledge work carried out by Construction Service DFP during refurbishment in 1998	Great Hall
2 photographs donated by Members of the CPA,	Commonwealth Room - 29
Statue of Britannia and two lions	On the roof of Parliament Buildings
Long Gallery Floor, with a star shaped centre piece	Long Gallery
Great Hall ceiling Classical Greek motifs, although some seem more Egyptian, heavily gilded with gold	Great Hall
Senate Gallery, three painted arabesques symbolising the important industries of 1930s, linen , ship building and agriculture	Senate
Light fittings, several of the lights fittings contain symbols of elks heads and gothic pointed fish scales	Throughout the building
Inscriptions above doors, which include Speaker Office, Commonwealth Room, First Minister and deputy First Minister	Ground floor Parliament Buildings'
Assembly Crest, this has been placed on the Speakers table	Chamber
The royal coat of arms, stamped into the leather in the Speakers elaborate canopied chair.	Senate Chamber
The Royal coat of arms	At the front entrance of the building
Inscription commemorating the laying of the foundation stone by the Duke of Abercorn, The first governor of Northern Ireland, on 19th May 1928.	At the front entrance of the building
Flags in Commonwealth room	Room 29 Commonwealth room
Lamp standards at the front of the building are adorned with lions and classical inspired carvings	At the front of Parliament Buildings
Inscription at the front of Parliament Buildings detailing that the building was opened on behalf of King George V by Prince of Wales on 16th November 1932.	At the front entrance of the building

Events Held at Parliament Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission how many events have been held at Parliament Buildings in each of the last 12 months. (AQW 6971/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): The attached table sets out the number of functions and tours that have taken place over the last 12 months.

	Event Numbers			Guest Numbers	
	Functions	Tours	Totals	Functions	Tours
Apr-07	20	47	67	1121	864
May-08	50	97	147	2994	2241
Jun-07	58	143	201	3342	4171
Jul-07	18	86	104	882	1535
Aug-07	20	84	104	859	1465
Sep-08	55	105	160	2565	2255
Oct-07	58	112	170	3954	8600
Nov-07	62	97	159	4956	2525
Dec-07	35	38	73	2538	881
Jan-08	42	53	95	3436	1714
Feb-08	57	87	144	4086	1861
Mar-08	48	75	123	2682	3879
2007/08 Totals	523	1024	1,547	33,415	31,991

Indexes

INDEX

PART I (BUSINESS)

- 2010 Quarter-centenary of the Plantation of Ulster, 342–3
2011 Census, 36–7
2012 Olympic Games, WA295–6, WA341
A2 Road Widening Schemes, WA378–9
A3 Road from Portadown, WA156
A4 Road Works, WA92
A5 Upgrade, 150–1
Absence Figures, WA221
Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 93–105
Accident and Emergency Ambulances, WA363
Accident and Emergency Vehicles, WA62–4, WA67–9, WA69–71
Action Renewables and Job Growth, WA226
Action Renewables Programme, 227–8
Ad Hoc Committee: Local Postal Services, 8
Adjournment
 Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 390–4
 Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast, 112–17
 Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 312–16
Administration Costs, 224–5
Advice Centre, WA55
After-School Clubs, WA203
After-School Groups, WA249–50
After-School Sports Activities, WA13–14
Agenda for Change Process, WA147
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 105–12
Agricultural Waste Energy, WA185
Agrienvironment Programme, WA191
Airport Car Parking, WA269
Alcohol and Drug Misuse, WA83–4
All Ireland Employment, WA223
Alley Gating, WA383, WA383–4, WA384
All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 223–4
Amateur Drama Festivals, WA110–11
Ambulance Cover, WA74–5, WA82
Ambulance Travel, WA90
Animal Carcasses, WA185
Animal Cruelty, WA9
Animal Welfare Legislation, WA187–8, WA188
Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme, WA97
Ards and Down Area Plan, WA349, WA349–50
Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry, WA51
Ards Borough Council Area, WA152–3
Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, WA60
Areas at Risk Programme, WA103–4
Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 30–1
Armagh Observatory, 28–9, WA13
Arthritis, WA61
Arts Council Funding, WA293–5, WA297, WA298
Asbestosis, WA61
Assembly Business, 1, 119
 British-Irish Council, 355
 Chairpersons/Deputy Chairpersons of Committees, 355
 North/South Ministerial Council, 355
Assembly Chamber: Refurbishment, 39–40
Assembly Questions, WA1, WA17, WA117
Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 226–7
At Home Nursing Care, WA264–5
Attacks on Causeway Hospital Staff, WA359
Attacks on Staff, WA134
Attempted Suicide Aftercare, WA252
Attempted Suicide Hospital Admissions, WA252–3
Average Levels of Debt, WA352–3
Awards for All Funding, WA14–15
Ballagh and Cortynan Crossings, WA88
Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry Service, WA373
Ballycolman Sewage Pumping Station, WA355
Ballymoney Railway Station, WA158
Balmoral High School, WA219–20, WA302
Balmoral Show, WA192–3
Ban on Cameras, 40–1
Bangor Hospital, WA364
Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee, WA384
Behavioural Problems in Schools, WA331
Belfast Health Action Zone, WA249
Belfast Marathon, WA153, WA15
Benefit Take-Up, WA169
Bicycle Proficiency Test, WA354
Bin Collection, WA49
Bin Fine Policy, WA130
Binge Drinking, 144–6
Biofuels, 229–30, WA39
Biomass Energy, WA185
Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Industries, WA124–5
Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors, WA234, WA342
Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine, WA333, WA341–2
Blind Registration, WA141
Blue Badges for the Disabled, WA379
Bluetongue, 220–1, WA191, WA192, WA292
Bonfire Funding, WA168
Bottled Water, 40
Breast Screening Units, WA141–2
British-Irish Council, 355
Broken and Stolen Electrical Equipment, WA356
Budget Allocation, WA71–2, WA72, WA72–3
Budget Spending Plans, WA58
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS1–9, CS11–6, CS17–24, CS27–32, CS33–9, CS41–51
 Extension of Committee Stage, 8–9
Building Sites, WA126
Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35–6
Bus Lanes, 151–2
Bus Safety, WA50, WA148, WA154
-

Business Class Flights, WA13, WA107, WA126, WA133, WA135, WA155, WA159–60, WA188, WA279, WA336
 Business Units, WA125
 Capital Building Programme, WA16
 Capital Expenditure, WA113
 Car Clubs, WA93
 Careers Advice Service, WA33
 Carer's Allowance Bill
 Second Stage, 193
 Cars Registered, WA45
 Castle Gardens Primary School, WA206, WA298
 Causes of Poverty, WA285
 Cervical Cancer Figures, WA250
 Chairpersons/Deputy Chairpersons of Committees, 355
 Changed Economic Environment, 230–1
 Charities Bill [NIA 9/07], CS25
 Child Poverty Strategy 2020, WA176–7
 Child Protection, WA263
 Childcare in Rural Areas, WA189–90
 Childcare Services, WA135–8, WA138–41
 Children and Young People's Funding Package, WA201–2
 Children in Severe Poverty, WA173
 Children Statemented, WA18–19, WA29–30
 Children with English as an Additional Language, WA220
 Children's Fund Projects, WA253–9
 Church Street, Ballymena, WA126
 Civic Forum, WA3, WA5, WA286
 Civil Servants Seeking Transfer, WA356–7
 Civil Service Commuter Statistics, WA247
 Claims of Discrimination, WA52–3
 Class Sizes, WA16
 Clostridium Difficile, 143, WA369
 Closure of Hospital Wards, WA367–8, WA368
 Coastline Protection, WA9–10
 Cod Fishing Industry, WA109
 College Merger, WA121
 Colony Collapse Disorder, WA288
 Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, WA107
 Consideration Stage, 119–42, 158–77
 Further Consideration Stage, 195–203
 Final Stage, 252–70
 Commissioner for Older People, 24
 Commissioners of the South Eastern and Education Library Board, WA301
 Committee Business
 Ad Hoc Committee: Local Postal Services, 8
 Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill
 Extension of Committee Stage, 8–9
 Education and the Economy, 232–46
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 319–37
 Standing Committee Membership, 355
 Standing Orders, 90–2
 Statutory Committee Membership, 355
 Committee Stage
 Committee for Finance and Personnel
 Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS1–9, CS11–6, CS17–24, CS27–32, CS33–9, CS41–51
 Committee for Social Development
 Charities Bill [NIA 9/07], CS25
 Common Housing Selection Scheme, WA98
 Commonwealth Games, WA112
 Communication with Farset, WA167
 Communication with the Fishing Industry, 221–2
 Community and Voluntary Sector, WA78–80, WA80
 Community Development for Minority Ethnic Groups, 155–7
 Community Festival Funding, WA299
 Community Nurses, WA142
 Community Psychiatric Nurses, WA73
 Community Relations Core Funding Scheme, WA196–7
 Community Support Programme, WA383
 Complaints in Schools, WA217, WA318
 Composition of Civil Service Staff, WA357–8
 Compost Collection Service, WA47–8
 Conlig Primary School, WA16
 Connswater Housing, WA281
 Conor Rise and Conor House, WA280
 Constitutional Reform Bill, WA6
 Consultants Vacancy, WA80
 Consultation, 24–6
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA289–91, WA296–7, WA333, WA342–46, WA351–2, WA367, WA377
 Co-Ownership Housing Association, WA379, WA384, WA385, WA387
 Co-Ownership Schemes, WA100, WA101, WA102, WA160, WA162, WA170
 Corporation Tax Review, WA239–40
 Council District, WA100
 Creative Youth Partnerships, WA326–7
 Cross-Border Mobility, WA57
 Crumlin Glen Project, WA127
 Cycle Paths, WA149
 Daisy Hill Hospital, WA59
 Dangerous Wild Animals, 29–30
 Danny Blanchflower Complex, WA110
 Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 18–23, 41–5
 Death of Robert Dunlop, 317–18
 Dementia Services, WA261
 Dental Care, WA81
 Dental Graduates, WA77–8, WA78
 Dental Service, WA134, WA361, WA361–2, WA364–5
 Dental Students, WA146–7
 Dentist Records, WA261–2
 Department Correspondence, WA122, WA127, WA144
 Department Wages, WA44
 Department Websites, WA112, WA177–8, WA207, WA223, WA228–9, WA243, WA247, WA260, WA270
 Departmental Correspondence, WA133–4
 Departmental Funding, WA11–13, WA58
 Departmental Information in Braille, WA299–300
 Departmental Land, WA3, WA10, WA48, WA87–8, WA89–90, WA122, WA124, WA133, WA134, WA143, WA149, WA160, WA162, WA199, WA347, WA380–1, WA381–3

Departmental Legal Costs, WA222, WA262, WA280–1
 Departmental Publications, WA269, WA280, WA286–7, WA295, WA311
 Departmental Spending, WA47, WA89, WA124
 Departmental Websites, WA185–6, WA281
 Derry City Football Club, 339–40
 Desks for Back-Bench MLAs, WA389
 DHSSPS Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA84
 Diabetes, WA61, WA142, WA266
 Diabetic Ketoacidosis, WA76–7
 Dickson Plan for Education, WA307, WA307–8
 Direct Fuel Subsidies, WA8
 Director of Public Health, WA81
 Disability Action Proposed Relocation, WA181
 Disability Employment, WA306
 Disability Living Allowance, WA97, WA159, WA160
 Disability Targets, WA278, WA282
 Disabled Access in Victoria Square, WA379
 Disabled Facilities Grant, WA282
 Disabled Parking, WA151, WA156, WA274, WA278
 Disadvantaged Children, WA106–7
 Discretionary Student Incentive Scheme, WA260
 Disinfection Mats, WA61
 Distribution of Jobs, WA56
 District Councils, WA49
 Disused Culverts, WA148
 Document Accessibility for Visually Impaired People, 348
 Dog Fouling, WA131
 Domestic Tourism, WA228
 Domestic Violence, WA74
 Donaghadee High School, WA18, WA119–20, WA120, WA205, WA206, WA206–7, WA302, WA311
 Donemana Primary School, WA318
 Down High School in Downpatrick, WA313
 Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 215–16
 Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 26–7
 Draft Social Housing Development Programme, WA101
 DRD Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA93
 Driver Vehicle Testing Agency, WA51, WA244, WA245
 Driving Instructor Identification, WA244–5
 Driving Licences, WA47
 Driving License Applications, WA241
 Drug Addiction, WA83
 Drug and Alcohol Dependencies, WA84
 Drumcree/Garvaghy Road, WA182–3
 Drumragh Integrated College, WA328
 DSD Funding for Counselling Services, WA99, WA99–100
 DSD Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA101–2
 Dual Mandates, WA126
 Dundonald High School, 350–1
 Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 147–8
 Dyslexia Support, WA114
 Eastvale Avenue Housing Estate, WA96
 Eating Disorder Assistance, WA262
 Economically Active, WA42
 Economically Inactive, WA40, WA40–1
 Eco-Tourist Activities, WA237
 Education and the Economy, 232–46
 Education Funding, WA121
 Education Maintenance Allowance, WA334, WA335
 Education Maintenance Allowance: Absenteeism, 347–8
 Education Sector Employees, WA307
 Education Targets, WA204–5
 Education Village, WA28
 Education Welfare Officers, WA200–1
 Education Workforce, WA330–1
 Educational Psychologists, WA24
 Educational Targets, WA221–2
 Educational Welfare Officers, WA24
 Efficiency Targets, WA83
 Electricity Generators, WA36
 Electronic Distribution of Publications, WA42–3
 Emerald Fund, WA156–7
 Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon, WA263
 Emergency Planning Grant, WA242–3
 Employee Jobs by Industry, WA230–1
 Employer Liability Cover, WA27
 Employment Figures, WA347–8
 Energy Costs, WA237
 Energy Performance Certificates, WA97
 Enforcement Cases, WA43
 English as a Foreign Language Courses, WA332, WA332–3
 Enterprise Rail Link, WA92
 Environment and Heritage Service, WA127
 Environment and Renewable Energy Fund, WA36
 Environmental Improvement Schemes, WA167–8
 Environmental Protection Agency, WA240
 Epilepsy Sufferers, WA141
 Equal Pay, WA248
 Equal Rights and Social Need Division, WA183–4
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA108, WA111, WA116, WA132, WA224
 Equality Legislation, WA272
 Ethnic Minorities, WA7
 EU Funding, WA168, WA245, WA274, WA295
 Euro-Friendly Businesses, WA39
 European Fisheries Fund, WA8
 European Language Portfolio, 349–50
 European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme, WA346, WA346–7
 European Task Force for NI, 219–20
 Events Held at Parliament Buildings, WA392
 Executive Committee Business
 Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Consideration Stage, 119–42, 158–77
 Further Consideration Stage, 195–203
 Final Stage, 252–70
 Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 215–16
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 First Stage, 195

Second Stage, 382–9
 Insolvency (Disqualification from Office: General)
 Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 214
 Libraries Bill
 Consideration Stage, 177–83
 Further Consideration Stage, 318
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 47–90
 Further Consideration Stage, 184–92
 Final Stage, 203–13
 Mesothelioma, etc., Bill
 First Stage, 355
 Public Health (Amendment) Bill
 Royal Assent, 119
 Executive Office in Brussels, WA157
 Executive's Review of Rating, WA56
 Expenditure on Consultants, WA133
 Export-Orientated Small Firms, WA235–7
 Extended Schools Funding, 367–81, WA178
 Extended Schools Programme, WA300, WA328–30
 Fair Employment Laws, WA286
 Fallen Stock Carcasses, WA192
 Falling Pupil Numbers, WA330
 Family Information Group, WA2
 Family Planning Clinics, WA249
 Farm Animals, WA109
 Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, WA11, WA189
 Farm on Ballyrone Road, Katesbridge, WA288
 Farmed Animals: Welfare, 222–3
 Fast Food Applications, WA46
 Festival Funding, WA161–2
 Financial Services Industry, WA55–6
 Fire and Ambulance Service, WA360
 Fire and Rescue Appliances, WA143
 Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles, WA360
 Fire Prevention, WA113–14
 Fire Service Appliances, WA146
 Fire Stations, WA142
 Fish Stock in Irish Sea, WA186–7, WA187
 Fishery Harbours Authority, WA110
 Fishing Boats Fuel Consumption, WA186
 Flattened Head Syndrome, WA62, WA259
 Flood Protection, WA9
 Focus Farm Scheme, WA110, WA184
 Foreign Head of State Visits, WA174, WA174–5
 Foreign Road Users, WA44
 Forest Service Priorities, 226
 Forestry Strategy, WA191–2
 Former Employees from Manufacturing Sector, WA334
 Forster Green Development, WA252
 Foyle Connect Project, WA268
 Frances Street, Newtownards, WA88
 Fraud, WA260–1
 Free Personal Care, WA144, WA146, WA264
 Free School Meals, WA318–26
 Free Travel Over 60s, WA278–9
 Free Travel: Delay, 149–50
 Freedom of Information, WA1
 Fuel Allowance, WA158
 Fuel and Food Costs, WA178–9, WA179
 Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme, WA158
 Fuel Poverty, WA128, WA170
 Fuel Prices, WA381
 Funded Nursery School Places, WA316
 Funding for Children's Issues, WA178
 Funding for Constituency Offices, 38–9
 Funding for School Sports Finals, WA298
 Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence, WA175–6
 Funds surrendered in the EU Agrienvironment
 budget, WA188
 Further Education Campus, WA123–4
 Further Education Colleges, WA35
 Further Education Courses, WA123, WA124
 Further Education in Strabane, WA224
 Gambling Regulations, WA170–1
 Gas Prices, WA40
 GCSE Irish History, WA312
 Gender Equality Strategy, WA2–3
 General Practitioner Surgery, WA59
 Genito-Urinary Medicine, WA144
 Girona Collection, WA299
 Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, 340–1
 Glass Bottles, WA50
 Glastry School, WA25
 Glenariff Road, WA88
 Good Relations District Council Plans, WA285
 Good Relations Indicators, WA180
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 First Stage, 195
 Second Stage, 382–9
 Gortin Glen Forest Park, WA108
 Government Advertising, WA6
 Government Arrangements since Devolution, WA180
 Graduate Dentists, WA73, WA144
 Grammar School Entrance Exams, WA207, WA316–17,
 WA317
 Grammar Schools, WA317
 Green Spaces, WA167
 Greenbelt Company, WA128
 Ground Rents, WA131
 Grouse Population, WA245–6, WA246
 Growth in Industry Sectors, WA233
 Habitat on Millstone Mountain, WA354–5
 Hate Crime, WA182
 Head Teachers, WA113
 Health Service Dental Practices, WA265
 Health Service Dental Treatment, WA84–5
 Health Service Dentists, WA81, WA81–2
 Health Service Neurologists, WA141
 Health Service Pay Levels, WA368
 Healthcare in Prisons and Middletown Centre for
 Autism, WA263–4
 Heart Disease, WA62
 Heating Replacement Programme, WA103
 Heating Systems, WA167
 Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences, WA350

High Dependency Unit, WA60, WA60–1
 Hightown Road Bridge, WA39
 Hip Replacements, WA141, WA145–6
 Home Schooling, WA309–10, WA310, WA310–11
 Home-Help and Domiciliary Care Workers, WA368–9
 Homeless People, WA169
 Horse Sport Ireland, WA296
 Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in Limavady, WA384
 Hospital Plans, WA145
 Hospitals: Capital Expenditure, WA251
 Hostel Accommodation in Newtownards, WA384
 Housing Associations, WA163, WA165
 Housing Executive, WA96–7, WA97, WA98, WA160, WA162–3, WA163, WA163–4, WA165, WA165–6, WA166, WA168, WA379
 Housing Executive Expenditure, WA102
 Housing Executive Land in East Antrim, WA281–2
 Housing Executive Tenants, WA384
 Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget, WA386
 Housing Priorities, WA170
 Housing Selection Scheme, WA169
 Housing Waiting Lists, WA164, WA379–80
 Hydrogen Technology for Buses, WA276–7
 Icelandic and Faroese Fisheries, WA187
 ICT Management Services, WA25
 Illegal Dumping, WA128, WA241–2
 Illegal Waste Sites, WA354
 Implementation of Inclusion Agenda, WA209–10
 Incapacity Benefit, WA100
 Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, WA386–7
 Increase in Gas Prices, 228–9
 Independent Admission Exams, WA327, WA328, WA330
 Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services, WA94, WA95
 Independent Sector, WA144
 Independent Water Review Panel, WA94
 Industrial De-rating, WA54
 Industry in East Antrim, WA231
 Industry Sector Employment, WA233–4
 Infringement of Signage Regulations, WA350
 Inheritance Tax, WA359
 Insolvency (Disqualification from Office: General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 214
 Integrated Development Fund, WA177
 Integrated Status, WA26
 Interactive Whiteboards, WA199–200, WA208, WA208–9
 Interest Paid to Livestock Owners, WA293
 Interface Projects and Funding, WA175
 International Practical Shooting Sports, WA14
 Internet Content, WA252
 Interreg IV Funding, WA58
 Invest NI, WA42, WA336–7, WA337, WA337–40, WA340–1
 Investment Strategy 2008–2018, WA3
 Irish Books, WA24
 Irish Communication, WA111–12
 Irish Language, WA18, WA112, WA193
 Irish Language and Ulster-Scots, WA299
 Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA193
 Irish Language Groups, WA299
 Irish Language Officer, WA204, WA311–12
 Irish Language Schools, WA308
 Irish-Medium Schools, WA17, WA117–19, WA200
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 287–99
 Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane, WA387–8, WA388
 Joint Ministerial Committee, WA183
 Killard Special School, WA119
 Kindle Integrated Primary School, WA210–11, WA211–12, WA212–13, WA217
 Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works, WA87
 Land Abandonment, WA91
 Land Disposals, WA55
 Landfill Sites, WA49–50, WA246
 Landing and Marketing Dues, WA8
 Language Issues, 339
 Language Translation, WA117, WA119
 Larne Marina, WA43
 Legislation to Protect Caravan Owners, WA388
 Leylandii Hedges, WA45
 Liaison Work with DEL, WA224
 Libraries Bill
 Consideration Stage, 177–83
 Further Consideration Stage, 318
 Ligoniel Improvement Association, WA103
 Lindsay Hall Facility at Loughry College, WA288–9
 Liquor Licensing Laws, WA101
 Lisanelly Site, WA148
 Litter Free Zones, WA129–30
 Local Commissioning Groups, WA82, WA260
 Local Community Fund, WA385
 Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 47–90
 Further Consideration Stage, 184–92
 Final Stage, 203–13
 Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences, 33–4
 Local Produce, WA58
 Local SMEs: Incentives, WA239
 Locally Produced Food, WA38
 Long-Term Unemployment Figures, WA232–3
 Lough Neagh Partnership, WA231–2
 Loughry Police Training College, WA178
 Magnetic Resonance Imaging, WA80
 Malnutrition Statistics, WA262
 Matters of the Day
 Death of Robert Dunlop, 317–18
 Spamont Car Bomb, 247–8
 Maze Stadium, WA113, WA298
 Maze Stadium Site, WA14
 Maze/Long Kesh Site, WA181–2
 Media Monitoring Expenditures, WA224
 Media Monitoring, WA245
 Medical Secretaries, WA62

-
- Meeting Requests, WA173
 Meeting Times, WA153
 Mental Health, WA141
 Mental-Health and Learning-Disability Funding for Children, WA251–2
 Mental-Health Patient Complaints, WA253
 Merger of Stranmillis College with Queen’s University Belfast, WA334–5
 Mesothelioma, etc., Bill
 First Stage, 355
 MiddleStep Services, 146
 Middletown Centre for Autism, WA218, WA218–19, WA219, WA264, WA303, WA308, WA308–9
 Midnight Soccer, WA11
 Migrant Workers, WA108–9, WA120–1
 Mill Pond in Castlewellan, WA354, WA355–6
 Millennium Way Phase 2, WA156
 Millisle Primary School, WA198
 Ministerial Directions, WA58
 Ministerial Statement
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 249–52
 Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 1–8
 Ministry of Defence Sites, WA5
 Minor Injuries Unit, WA73
 Minor Works Capital Scheme, WA219
 Mobile Classrooms, WA197, WA301
 Modern Football Facilities, WA299
 Modernisation Fund, WA158–9, WA283
 Modernisation Fund Capital Programme, WA162
 Movement of Circuses, WA188
 Movilla High School, WA26
 Multi-Sports Stadium, 341–2
 Museums Council, WA196
 Myasthenia Gravis Disease, WA360
 National Carers’ Strategy, WA283
 National Fallen Stock Scheme, WA288
 National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, WA365–6
 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA49, WA111
 New Computers, WA132–3
 New Councils, WA241
 New Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen, WA230
 New Jobs in West Belfast and Shankill Areas, WA237–8
 New Library in Newtownards, WA298
 New Local Councils, WA350
 New Search Facility, WA284
 New Tax on Conacre Land, WA291
 Newcastle to Hilltown Road, WA88
 Newry Ambulance Station, WA85
 NHS Dental Services, WA75, WA75–6, WA76
 NI and ROI Economy, WA240
 NI Housing Executive, WA280
 Non-Domestic Ratepayers, WA53–4, WA54–5
 North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 216–18
 North Down Borough Council Area, WA153–4
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 249–52
 North/South Ministerial Council, 355
 Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, WA267, WA268
 Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 28, 218
 Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association, WA103
 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, WA250–1
 Northern Ireland Housing Executive, WA102
 Northern Ireland Produce, WA37, WA38
 Northern Ireland Railways, WA87, WA154
 Northern Ireland Water, WA46, WA151–2, WA355
 Northern Ireland’s Railway Service, WA158
 Northgate, WA25
 Number of Alcoholics, WA83
 Number of Ambulances, WA65–7
 Numeracy and Literacy Skills, WA203–4
 Nursery Provision, WA27–8
 Nursery School Places, WA314–15
 Nursery School Places in Bangor, WA318
 Nursery School Places in Carryduff, WA315, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Comber, WA313
 Nursery School Places in Donaghadee and Millisle, WA317–18
 Nursery School Places in Dundonald, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Holywood, WA317
 Nursery School Places in Killyleagh, WA315–16, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Saintfield, WA312, WA312–13
 Nurses Vacancy, WA80
 Nursing/Residential Home Residents, WA267
 Occupational Therapists, WA142
 Occupational Therapy Course, WA121–2
 Off-Sales, WA45
 Official Meetings, WA9, WA101
 Off-Road Bikes, WA103
 OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 218–19
 Olympic Events, WA112–13
 Operation Cancellations, WA250
 Oral Answers to Questions
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Administration Costs, 224–5
 All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 223–4
 Bluetongue, 220–1
 Communication with the Fishing Industry, 221–2
 Farmed Animals: Welfare, 222–3
 Forest Service Priorities, 226
 Rural Childcare Provision, 225–6
 Assembly Commission
 Assembly Chamber: Refurbishment, 39–40
 Ban on Cameras, 40–1
 Bottled Water, 40
 Funding for Constituency Offices, 38–9
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 2010 Quarter-centenary of the Plantation of Ulster, 342–3
 Derry City Football Club, 339–40
 Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, 340–1
-

-
- Language Issues, 339
 - Multi-Sports Stadium, 341–2
 - Performing Right Society, 341
 - Sporting Excellence, 338–9
 - Support Structure for Museums, 340
 - US Visit, 342
 - Education
 - Dundonald High School, 350–1
 - European Language Portfolio, 349–50
 - Paedophile Information Exchange, 348–9
 - School Crossing, 351–2
 - Selection at Age 14, 353
 - South Eastern Education and Library Board, 352–3
 - Employment and Learning
 - Document Accessibility for Visually Impaired People, 348
 - Education Maintenance Allowance:
 - Absenteeism, 347–8
 - Sign-Language Interpreting, 344–5
 - Skills in the Farming Community, 346–7
 - Stranmillis University College: Merger, 345–6
 - University Capacity and Student Demand, 343–4
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Action Renewables Programme, 227–8
 - Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 226–7
 - Biofuels, 229–30
 - Changed Economic Environment, 230–1
 - Increase in Gas Prices, 228–9
 - Environment
 - Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 30–1
 - Armagh Observatory, 28–9
 - Dangerous Wild Animals, 29–30
 - Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33
 - Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences, 33–4
 - Planning Circular PC 03/07, 31–2
 - Road Safety: Advertisements, 32
 - World Heritage Sites and National Parks, 30
 - Finance and Personnel
 - 2011 Census, 36–7
 - Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35–6
 - Peace II Extension, 34–5
 - Post Offices: Rates Relief, 38
 - Rates Relief for over 70s, 37–8
 - Stormont Events, 36
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Binge Drinking, 144–6
 - Clostridium Difficile, 143
 - MiddleStep Services, 146
 - Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 144–6
 - Private Practice Dentists, 146–7
 - Stroke Strategy, 143–4
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Commissioner for Older People, 24
 - Consultation, 24–6
 - Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 26–7
 - European Task Force for NI, 219–20
 - North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 216–18
 - Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, 218
 - Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 28
 - OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 218–19
 - Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27–8
 - Regional Development
 - A5 Upgrade, 150–1
 - Bus Lanes, 151–2
 - Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 147–8
 - Free Travel: Delay, 149–50
 - Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 152–3
 - Waterside Railway Station, 148–9
 - Social Development
 - Community Development for Minority Ethnic Groups, 155–7
 - Public Housing Stock, 153–4
 - Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155
 - Review of Public Administration, 154–5
 - Shared Future Housing, 157–68
 - Organic and Free Range Products, WA189
 - Organic Food Production, WA292
 - Outpatient Clinic Appointments, WA77
 - Overhead Power Lines, WA55
 - Paedophile Information Exchange, 348–9
 - Paramilitary Flags, WA107–8
 - Parental Disciplining, WA73
 - Parkhall College, WA20, WA26
 - Parking in Belfast, WA270–1, WA271, WA271–2
 - Parking Schemes, WA155
 - Parking Tickets, WA86–7, WA149, WA274
 - Partnership Body, WA3
 - Passing Bays on the Carrowclare Road, WA370–1
 - Pathways to Work Programme, WA335
 - Peace II Extension, 34–5
 - Peace III Expenditure, WA57
 - Peace III Programme, WA248
 - Pellet Guns, WA73–4
 - People with Disabilities, WA42, WA108, WA111, WA121, WA127, WA142, WA150
 - Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA57
 - Performing Right Society, 341
 - Petrol Service Station Closures, WA42
 - PhD Projects, WA35
 - Physiotherapists Employed in Health and Social Care, WA250
 - Physiotherapy Services, WA266
 - Pigeon Racing, WA300
 - Planning Appeals Commission Procedures, WA1–2
 - Planning Appeals Commission, WA4, WA5–6
 - Planning Applications, WA43, WA44, WA45, WA47, WA50, WA50–1, WA130, WA130–1, WA240, WA244, WA246
 - Planning Approvals, WA43
 - Planning Circular PC 03/07, 31–2
 - Planning Law, WA49
 - Planning Legislation, WA126
 - Planning Policy Statement 14, WA353
 - Planning Service Recruitment, WA246
-

Planning Service, WA45, WA128
 Plant Equipment, WA87
 Plastic Bags, WA51–2
 Pollution Incidents in the Three Milewater River, WA353–4
 Post Offices: Rates Relief, 38
 Post-Primary Pupil Figures, WA220, WA220–1
 Post-Primary Education Research Costs, WA311
 Post-Primary Transfer, 270–86, WA105
 Potato Industry, WA190–1
 Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183
 Practising Dentists, WA359–60, WA360
 Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA238, WA334
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 319–37
 Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 144–6
 Primary and Post-Primary School Absences, WA313–14, WA314
 Primary and Post-Primary School Figures, WA301–2, WA331
 Primary School Figures, WA221, WA332
 Primary School Funding, WA327–8
 Primary School Pupil Figures, WA214–15
 Priorities for Action 2008/09, WA367
 Private Finance Initiative Library, WA295
 Private Members' Business
 Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 93–105
 Aggregates Mapping Programme, 105–12
 Carer's Allowance Bill
 Second Stage, 193
 Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 18–23, 41–5
 Extended Schools Funding, 367–81
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 287–99
 Post-Primary Transfer, 270–86
 Reclassification of Cannabis, 356–66
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 9–18
 Sustainable Energy, 300–12
 Private Practice Dentists, 146–7
 Private Sector Deal, WA36–7
 Proposed Merger, WA35–6, WA36
 Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 390–4
 Public Health (Amendment) Bill
 Royal Assent, 119
 Public Housing Stock, 153–4
 Public Inquiry into Mrs McGinley's Death, WA360–1
 Public Procurement Procedures, WA261
 Public Road Maintenance, WA269
 Public Service Agreement 7, WA179–80
 Public Toilets in Hospitals, WA145
 Publication Spending, WA173–4
 Publicity and Advertising, WA143–4, WA196, WA222–3, WA356
 Publicity and Advertising Costs, WA187
 Publicity and Advertising Spending, WA127
 Pump Water Storage System at Camlough, WA229–30
 Pupil Profiles in Primary Schools, WA315
 Pupils with Special Educational Needs, WA303–6, WA306–7
 Rail Accidents, WA268
 Rail Services, WA277, WA279
 Railway Halt in Ballykelly, WA88–9
 Radox Manufacturing and Research Facility, WA348–9
 Rate Relief, WA57–8
 Rates Debt, WA57
 Rates Relief for over 70s, 37–8
 Rebuilt Library in Bangor, WA297
 Recent Pollution in Crumlin River, WA355
 Reclassification of Cannabis, 356–66
 Reconnect Scheme, WA347
 Recycling, WA20
 Recycling in Schools, WA198
 Recycling Targets, WA48
 Redevelopment of the Strabane Jobs and Benefits Agency, WA389
 Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155
 Reduction of Councils, WA241
 Redundancies and Pension Rights, WA241
 Reform of Planning System, WA243–4
 Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast, 112–17
 Regional Hospital, WA145
 Regional Infrastructure Programme, WA167
 Regional Tourism Partnerships, WA239
 Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, WA146
 Regulation of Pharmacies, WA265
 Re-Imaging Communities Programme, WA194–6
 Renewable Energy, WA237, WA238–9, WA248, WA283, WA347, WA348
 Renewable Energy Developments, WA129
 Renewable Energy Resources, WA20–3, WA23
 Renewable Energy Targets, WA225–6, WA226
 Renewing Communities Fund, WA102–3, WA282
 Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme, WA288
 Replacement Grants, WA385–6
 Residential Care, WA147
 Residents' Parking Schemes, WA157
 Respite Care Facility in Quarry Lane, Dungannon, WA368
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 9–18
 Review of Public Administration, 154–5
 Review of Support Provision for Carers, WA268
 Review of Teacher Education, WA115–16
 Revised Curriculum, WA32
 Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients, WA263
 Rivers Agency, WA8–9, WA10
 Road Accidents, WA86
 Road and Water Plans in Crumlin, WA273
 Road and Water Plans in Mallusk, WA273–4
 Road and Water Plans in Randalstown, WA273
 Road Bridges, WA85–6, WA86
 Road Maintenance Allocations, WA369
 Road Safety, WA86
 Road Safety: Advertisements, 32
 Road Safety Issues, WA279
 Road Safety Measures in Donaghadee, WA378
 Road Safety Measures in Millisle, WA377–8

Road Schemes, WA149–50
 Road Side Memorials, WA155
 Road Works Projects, WA275–6
 Roads Service Safer Roads, WA90
 Rock Excavation, WA279–80
 Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve, WA105
 Royal Victoria Hospital, WA60, WA61, WA145,
 WA266–7, WA267, WA268
 Rural Childcare Provision, 225–6
 Rural Communities, WA109–10
 Rural Development Programme, WA184–5
 Rural Post Offices, WA190
 Rural Proofing, WA26, WA59–60, WA97
 Rural Transport Fund, WA157
 Sale of Department Land, WA193
 Sale of Land, WA91
 Satellite Monitoring Equipment, WA7–8
 School Board of Governors, WA206
 School Capital Building Schemes, WA327
 School Crossing, 351–2
 School Crossing Patrol Officers, WA17–18
 School Curriculum, WA207–8
 School Principal Appointments, WA204
 School Transport, WA16, WA20, WA27
 School Uniforms, WA203
 Schools Building Programme, WA198
 Scottish Marine Bill, WA241
 Sea Pollution, WA51
 Search and Rescue Services, WA74
 Seaweed in Ards Peninsula, WA244, WA245
 Secondary School Pupil Figures, WA214, WA215,
 WA216, WA216–17
 Secondary Schools, WA317
 Sectarianism, WA4
 Selection at Age 14, 353
 Selection of New Committee Members, WA197
 Senior SmartPass Holders, WA90, WA90–1
 Service Framework Development, WA262
 Sewerage System, WA93–4
 Sewerage Works, WA156
 Sex Education, WA18
 Sexual Orientation Issues, WA173
 Sexually Transmitted Diseases, WA248–9
 Shared Future Housing, 157–8
 Sick Leave, WA46, WA55
 Signage for Drivers in Fountain Hill, Derry/
 Londonderry, WA376
 Sign-Language Interpreting, 344–5
 Single Electricity Market, WA225
 Single Equality Bill, WA1, WA7
 Single Farm Payment Applications, WA293
 Single Farm Payment Scheme, WA185
 Skills Base, WA33
 Skills in the Farming Community, 346–7
 Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, WA234–5
 SmartPass Fares, WA279
 Smoke Free, WA147–8
 Smoking Cessation Programmes, WA148
 Social Housing, WA160–1
 Social Housing Accommodation, WA161
 Social Inequality, WA176
 Social Mobility, WA15
 Social Security Agency, WA103
 South Eastern Education and Library Board, 352–3,
 WA19, WA29
 South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, WA142
 South Eastern Regional College, WA333–4
 South Eastern Trust Plans, WA250
 Spamount Car Bomb, 247–8
 Speaker's Business, 119
 Special Education Needs Figures, WA217
 Special Needs Education Expenditure, WA197–8
 Speech and Language Therapists, WA147
 Speed Limits, WA269–70
 Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA218
 Sport NI, WA14
 Sporting Excellence, 338–9
 Sports and Tourism, WA238
 Sports Grounds, WA114
 Springhill Shopping Centre, WA91–2, WA92
 St Colman's College, WA15–16
 St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's College in
 Banbridge, WA312
 St Mary's University College, WA335
 St Patrick's Day Celebrations, WA349
 St Patrick's Trail, WA224
 Staff Absence, WA10, WA30–2, WA33–5, WA82,
 WA83, WA105–6, WA247–8
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA10–11, WA32,
 WA47, WA78, WA91, WA121, WA356
 Staff Sickness, WA169
 Staff Working from Home, WA42, WA55
 Standing Committee Membership, 355
 Standing Orders, 90–2
 Statutory Committee Membership, 355
 Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin
 Hospital, WA357
 Stoma and Incontinence Appliances, WA249
 Stormont Events, 36
 Strangford Lough, WA350–1
 Stranmillis University College, WA35, WA122–3,
 WA123
 Stranmillis University College: Merger, 345–6
 Street Lighting, WA157
 Stress-Related Illness, WA112, WA120, WA177,
 WA184, WA222, WA227, WA241, WA246–7,
 WA358–9, WA362–3, WA371–3, WA378, WA383
 Stroke Strategy, 143–4
 Sub Regional Community Networks, WA287, WA288
 Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA180–1
 Suicide Prevention Strategy, WA71
 Suicide Prevention, WA146
 Sun Bed Regulations, WA363
 Support for Irish Language and GAA Organisations,
 WA193
 Support Structure for Museums, 340

Supported Housing Schemes, WA95–6
 Supported Living Schemes, WA95
 Supporting People Programme, WA71
 Sure Start Programme, WA32, WA116, WA199
 Suspension of Children, WA208
 Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, WA231
 Sustainable Development Forum, WA285–6
 Sustainable Development Strategy, WA176, WA226–7
 Sustainable Energy, 300–12
 Symbols and Emblems on Display in the Stormont
 Assembly Estate, WA389–92
 Tarmacking of Roads, WA272, WA272–3
 Teachers, WA300–1
 Teaching Jobs, WA303
 Teaching Posts, WA24–5
 Teaching Staff, WA114–15
 Teenage Pregnancies, WA134–5
 Telephone Calls, WA173
 Tesco Meat Range and Prices, WA292–3
 Thompson Solutions, WA39–40, WA151
 Ticketing System, WA150
 Tobacco Products, WA145
 Toome Bypass, WA93
 Tourism, WA240
 Tourism in Forest Parks, WA192
 Tourist Board Advertising, WA37
 Tourist Board Promotion, WA232
 Tourist Board, WA39
 Town Centres, WA169–70
 Townland Names, WA16, WA371
 Traffic Accidents, WA354
 Traffic Calming Measures, WA275, WA375–6
 Traffic Calming Measures at Movilla Road,
 Newtownards, WA92–3
 Traffic Calming Measures in North Down, WA370
 Traffic Congestion in Waringstown, WA276
 Traffic Flow, WA270
 Training for Success Programme, WA335, WA336
 Transfer of Legal Files, WA261
 Transferors Representative Council, WA26
 Transferred Redundancies, WA207
 Translating Correspondence, WA11
 Translink Buses, WA370
 Travel Time to Schools, WA311
 Travellers' Sites, WA164
 Tree Preservation Orders, WA45–6, WA46, WA48,
 WA126
 Trip to Texas, WA11
 Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 152–3
 Tuberculosis Outbreaks, WA293
 Ulster Canal, WA298
 Ulster Hospital, WA84
 Ulster Museum, WA111
 Ulster Scots Drama, WA18
 Ulsterbus Goldline Express, WA94
 Ulsterbus, WA376
 Ulster-Scots Cultural Office, WA13
 Ulster-Scots Cultural Tourism, WA13
 Underage and Public Drinking, WA101
 Undergraduate Drop-Out Cost, WA32–3
 Unemployment Rates, WA41
 Union Flag, WA171
 University Capacity and Student Demand, 343–4
 University of Ulster Computer Training Officers, WA333
 Unlawful Signage, WA369
 Unpaid Rates, WA131–2
 Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA171
 Urban Regeneration, WA101, WA164–5
 US Visit, 342
 Vacancy Control Policy, WA23
 Vacant Consultant Posts, WA363–4, WA364
 Vacant Industrial Buildings, WA44
 Vandalism to Railway and Bus Stations, WA276
 Varney II Report, WA56
 Vetting Systems, WA19
 Victims and Survivors, WA105
 Victims' Commissioners, WA1, WA7, WA181
 Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27–8
 Victoria School, Ballyhalbert, WA204
 Village Tourism, WA37–8
 Violence in Schools, WA203
 Visitors to Northern Ireland, WA227, WA228
 Visually Impaired, WA261
 Voltage Power Lines, WA47, WA200
 Voluntary and Community Groups, WA144
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results, WA250
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Belfast Trust,
 WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Northern Trust,
 WA367
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: South Eastern
 Trust, WA365
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Southern Trust,
 WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Western Trust,
 WA366
 Walking to School, WA155
 Warm Homes Scheme, WA168
 Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 312–16
 Waste Water Treatment Works, WA127
 Water and Roads Service, WA277, WA278, WA373–5
 Water Charges, WA168
 Water Levels in Clea Lakes, WA189
 Water Meters, WA93, WA376
 Water Preservation, WA154
 Water Pressure, WA157
 Water Rates, WA154
 Water Supply, WA153
 Waterside Hospital, WA265
 Waterside Railway Station, 148–9
 Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
 Ireland, 1–8
 Website Review, WA4–5
 Welfare Officers, WA23–4
 Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease, WA59
 Wind Farm Applications, WA129

Wind Farms, WA51
 Wind Turbines, WA129, WA225
 Winter Fuel Payments, WA387
 Wood Pellet Boilers, WA167
 Work from Home, WA14, WA49, WA106, WA109,
 WA119, WA122, WA149, WA167, WA260
 World Heritage Sites and National Parks, 30
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agricultural Waste Energy, WA185
 Agrienvironment Programme, WA191
 Animal Carcasses, WA185
 Animal Cruelty, WA9
 Animal Welfare Legislation, WA187–8, WA188
 Balmoral Show, WA192–3
 Biomass Energy, WA185
 Bluetongue, WA191, WA192, WA292
 Business Class Flights, WA188
 Childcare in Rural Areas, WA189–90
 Coastline Protection, WA9–10
 Cod Fishing Industry, WA109
 Colony Collapse Disorder, WA288
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA289–91
 Departmental Land, WA10
 Departmental Publications, WA286–7
 Departmental Websites, WA185–6
 Direct Fuel Subsidies, WA8
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA108
 European Fisheries Fund, WA8
 Fallen Stock Carcasses, WA192
 Farm Animals, WA109
 Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, WA11,
 WA189
 Farm on Ballyrone Road, Katesbridge, WA288
 Fish Stock in Irish Sea, WA186–7, WA187
 Fishery Harbours Authority, WA110
 Fishing Boats Fuel Consumption, WA186
 Flood Protection, WA9
 Focus Farm Scheme, WA110, WA184
 Forestry Strategy, WA191–2
 Funds surrendered in the EU Agrienvironment
 budget, WA188
 Gortin Glen Forest Park, WA108
 Icelandic and Faroese Fisheries, WA187
 Interest Paid to Livestock Owners, WA293
 Landing and Marketing Dues, WA8
 Lindsay Hall Facility at Loughry College,
 WA288–9
 Migrant Workers, WA108–9
 Movement of Circuses, WA188
 National Fallen Stock Scheme, WA288
 New Tax on Conacre Land, WA291
 Official Meetings, WA9
 Organic and Free Range Products, WA189
 Organic Food Production, WA292
 People with Disabilities, WA108
 Potato Industry, WA190–1
 Publicity and Advertising Costs, WA187
 Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme, WA288
 Rivers Agency, WA8–9, WA10
 Rural Communities, WA109–10
 Rural Development Programme, WA184–5
 Rural Post Offices, WA190
 Satellite Monitoring Equipment, WA7–8
 Single Farm Payment Applications, WA293
 Single Farm Payment Scheme, WA185
 Staff Absence, WA10
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA10–11
 Stress-Related Illness, WA184
 Sub Regional Community Networks, WA287,
 WA288
 Tesco Meat Range and Prices, WA292–3
 Tourism in Forest Parks, WA192
 Tuberculosis Outbreaks, WA293
 Water Levels in Clea Lakes, WA189
 Work from Home, WA109
 Assembly Commission
 Desks for Back-Bench MLAs, WA389
 Events Held at Parliament Buildings, WA392
 New Search Facility, WA284
 Symbols and Emblems on Display in the
 Stormont Assembly Estate, WA389–92
 Union Flag, WA171
 Yellow Pages, WA283–4
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 2012 Olympic Games, WA295–6
 After-School Sports Activities, WA13–14
 Amateur Drama Festivals, WA110–11
 Armagh Observatory, WA13
 Arts Council Funding, WA293–5, WA297, WA298
 Awards for All Funding, WA14–15
 Belfast Marathon, WA15
 Business Class Flights, WA13
 Castle Gardens Primary School, WA298
 Commonwealth Games, WA112
 Community Festival Funding, WA299
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA296–7
 Danny Blanchflower Complex, WA110
 Department Websites, WA112
 Departmental Funding, WA11–13
 Departmental Information in Braille, WA299–300
 Departmental Publications, WA295
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA111
 EU Funding, WA295
 Funding for School Sports Finals, WA298
 Girona Collection, WA299
 Horse Sport Ireland, WA296
 International Practical Shooting Sports, WA14
 Irish Communication, WA111–12
 Irish Language, WA112, WA193
 Irish Language and Ulster-Scots, WA299
 Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA193
 Irish Language Groups, WA299
 Maze Stadium, WA113, WA298
 Maze Stadium Site, WA14
 Midnight Soccer, WA11

Modern Football Facilities, WA299
 Museums Council, WA196
 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA111
 New Library in Newtownards, WA298
 Olympic Events, WA112–13
 People with Disabilities, WA111
 Pigeon Racing, WA300
 Private Finance Initiative Library, WA295
 Publicity and Advertising, WA196
 Rebuilt Library in Bangor, WA297
 Re-Imaging Communities Programme, WA194–6
 Sale of Department Land, WA193
 Sport NI, WA14
 Stress-Related Illness, WA112
 Support for Irish Language and GAA Organisations, WA193
 Translating Correspondence, WA11
 Trip to Texas, WA11
 Ulster Canal, WA298
 Ulster Museum, WA111
 Ulster-Scots Cultural Office, WA13
 Ulster-Scots Cultural Tourism, WA13
 Work from Home, WA14

Education

Absence Figures, WA221
 After-School Clubs, WA203
 Assembly Questions, WA17, WA117
 Balmoral High School, WA219–20, WA302
 Behavioural Problems in Schools, WA331
 Capital Building Programme, WA16
 Capital Expenditure, WA113
 Castle Gardens Primary School, WA206
 Children and Young People's Funding Package, WA201–2
 Children Statemented, WA18–19, WA29–30
 Children with English as an Additional Language, WA220
 Class Sizes, WA16
 Commissioners of the South Eastern and Education Library Board, WA301
 Community Relations Core Funding Scheme, WA196–7
 Complaints in Schools, WA217, WA318
 Conlig Primary School, WA16
 Creative Youth Partnerships, WA326–7
 Department Websites, WA207
 Departmental Land, WA199
 Departmental Publications, WA311
 Dickson Plan for Education, WA307, WA307–8
 Disability Employment, WA306
 Donaghadee High School, WA18, WA119–20, WA120, WA205, WA206, WA206–7, WA302, WA311
 Donemana Primary School, WA318
 Down High School in Downpatrick, WA313
 Drumragh Integrated College, WA328
 Dyslexia Support, WA114
 Education Sector Employees, WA307
 Education Targets, WA204–5
 Education Village, WA28
 Education Welfare Officers, WA200–1
 Education Workforce, WA330–1
 Educational Psychologists, WA24
 Educational Welfare Officers, WA24
 Employer Liability Cover, WA27
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA116
 Extended Schools Programme, WA300, WA328–30
 Falling Pupil Numbers, WA330
 Fire Prevention, WA113–14
 Free School Meals, WA318–26
 Funded Nursery School Places, WA316
 GCSE Irish History, WA312
 Glastry School, WA25
 Grammar School Entrance Exams, WA207, WA316–17, WA317
 Grammar Schools, WA317
 Head Teachers, WA113
 Home Schooling, WA309–10, WA310, WA310–11
 ICT Management Services, WA25
 Implementation of Inclusion Agenda, WA209–10
 Independent Admission Exams, WA327, WA328, WA330
 Integrated Status, WA26
 Interactive Whiteboards, WA199–200, WA208, WA208–9
 Irish Books, WA24
 Irish Language, WA18
 Irish Language Officer, WA204, WA311–12
 Irish Language Schools, WA308
 Irish-Medium Schools, WA17, WA117–19, WA200
 Killard Special School, WA119
 Kindle Integrated Primary School, WA210–11, WA211–12, WA212–13, WA217
 Language Translation, WA117, WA119
 Middletown Centre for Autism, WA218, WA218–19, WA219, WA303, WA308, WA308–9
 Millisle Primary School, WA198
 Minor Works Capital Scheme, WA219
 Mobile Classrooms, WA197, WA301
 Movilla High School, WA26
 Northgate, WA25
 Numeracy and Literacy Skills, WA203–4
 Nursery Provision, WA27–8
 Nursery School Places, WA314–15
 Nursery School Places in Bangor, WA318
 Nursery School Places in Carryduff, WA315, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Comber, WA313, WA313, WA313
 Nursery School Places in Donaghadee and Millisle, WA317–18
 Nursery School Places in Dundonald, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Holywood, WA317
 Nursery School Places in Killyleagh, WA315–16, WA316, WA312

Nursery School Places in Saintfield, WA312–13
 Parkhall College, WA20, WA26
 Post-Primary Pupil Figures, WA220, WA220–1
 Post-Primary Education Research Costs, WA311
 Primary and Post-Primary School Absences,
 WA313–14, WA314
 Primary and Post-Primary School Figures,
 WA301–2, WA331
 Primary School Figures, WA221, WA332
 Primary School Funding, WA327–8
 Primary School Pupil Figures, WA214–15
 Pupil Profiles in Primary Schools, WA315
 Pupils with Special Educational Needs,
 WA303–6, WA306–7
 Recycling, WA20
 Recycling in Schools, WA198
 Renewable Energy Resources, WA20–3, WA23
 Review of Teacher Education, WA115–16
 Revised Curriculum, WA32
 Rural Proofing, WA26
 School Board of Governors, WA206
 School Capital Building Schemes, WA327
 School Crossing Patrol Officers, WA17–18
 School Curriculum, WA207–8
 School Principal Appointments, WA204
 School Transport, WA16, WA20, WA27
 School Uniforms, WA203
 Schools Building Programme, WA198
 Secondary School Pupil Figures, WA214,
 WA215, WA216, WA216–17
 Secondary Schools, WA317
 Selection of New Committee Members, WA197
 Sex Education, WA18
 Social Mobility, WA15
 South Eastern Education and Library Board,
 WA19, WA29
 Special Education Needs Figures, WA217
 Special Needs Education Expenditure,
 WA197–8
 Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA218
 Sports Grounds, WA114
 St Colman's College, WA15–16
 St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's
 College in Banbridge, WA312
 Staff Absence, WA30–2
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA32
 Stress-Related Illness, WA120
 Sure Start Programme, WA32, WA116, WA199
 Suspension of Children, WA208
 Teachers, WA300–1
 Teaching Jobs, WA303
 Teaching Posts, WA24–5
 Teaching Staff, WA114–15
 Townland Names, WA16
 Transferors Representative Council, WA26
 Transferred Redundancies, WA207
 Travel Time to Schools, WA311
 Ulster Scots Drama, WA18

Vacancy Control Policy, WA23
 Vetting Systems, WA19
 Victoria School, Ballyhalbert, WA204
 Violence in Schools, WA203
 Voltage Power Lines, WA200
 Welfare Officers, WA23–4
 Work from Home, WA119
 Youth Club Leaders in the Foyle
 Constituency, WA315
 Youth Workers, WA29, WA115, WA202–3
 Employment and Learning
 All Ireland Employment, WA223
 Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine, WA333
 Careers Advice Service, WA33
 College Merger, WA121
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA333
 Department Correspondence, WA122
 Department Websites, WA223
 Departmental Land, WA122
 Departmental Legal Costs, WA222
 Departmental Spending, WA124
 Education Funding, WA121
 Education Maintenance Allowance, WA334,
 WA335
 Educational Targets, WA221–2
 English as a Foreign Language Courses,
 WA332, WA332–3
 Former Employees from Manufacturing Sector,
 WA334
 Further Education Campus, WA123–4
 Further Education Colleges, WA35
 Further Education Courses, WA123, WA124
 Further Education in Strabane, WA224
 Liaison Work with DEL, WA224
 Media Monitoring Expenditures, WA224
 Merger of Stranmillis College with Queen's
 University Belfast, WA334–5
 Migrant Workers, WA120–1
 Occupational Therapy Course, WA121–2
 Pathways to Work Programme, WA335
 People with Disabilities, WA121
 PhD Projects, WA35
 Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA334
 Proposed Merger, WA35–6, WA36
 Publicity and Advertising, WA222–3
 Skills Base, WA33
 South Eastern Regional College, WA333–4
 St Mary's University College, WA335
 Staff Absence, WA33–5
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA121
 Stranmillis University College, WA35, WA122–3,
 WA123
 Stress-Related Illness, WA222
 Training for Success Programme, WA335, WA336
 Undergraduate Drop-Out Cost, WA32–3
 University of Ulster Computer Training
 Officers, WA333
 Work from Home, WA122

Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Renewable Energy, WA237, WA238–9, WA347, WA348
2012 Olympic Games, WA341	Renewable Energy Targets, WA225–6, WA226
Action Renewables and Job Growth, WA226	Single Electricity Market, WA225
Biofuels, WA39	Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, WA234–5
Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Industries, WA124–5	Sports and Tourism, WA238
Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors, WA234, WA342	St Patrick's Day Celebrations, WA349
Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine, WA341–2	St Patrick's Trail, WA224
Business Class Flights, WA336	Staff Working from Home, WA42
Business Units, WA125	Stress-Related Illness, WA227
Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA342–46	Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, WA231
Corporation Tax Review, WA239–40	Sustainable Development Strategy, WA226–7
Department Websites, WA228–9	Thompson Solutions, WA39–40
Departmental Land, WA124, WA347	Tourism, WA240
Domestic Tourism, WA228	Tourist Board Advertising, WA37
Economically Active, WA42	Tourist Board Promotion, WA232
Economically Inactive, WA40, WA40–1	Tourist Board, WA39
Eco-Tourist Activities, WA237	Unemployment Rates, WA41
Electricity Generators, WA36	Village Tourism, WA37–8
Electronic Distribution of Publications, WA42–3	Visitors to Northern Ireland, WA227, WA228
Employee Jobs by Industry, WA230–1	Wind Turbines, WA225
Employment Figures, WA347–8	Zoned Land, WA125
Energy Costs, WA237	Environment
Environment and Renewable Energy Fund, WA36	Ards and Down Area Plan, WA349, WA349–50
Equality Impact Assessments, WA224	Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry, WA51
Euro-Friendly Businesses, WA39	Average Levels of Debt, WA352–3
European Sustainable Competitiveness Operational Programme, WA346, WA346–7	Ballycolman Sewage Pumping Station, WA355
Export-Orientated Small Firms, WA235–7	Bicycle Proficiency Test, WA354
Gas Prices, WA40	Bin Collection, WA49
Growth in Industry Sectors, WA233	Bin Fine Policy, WA130
Hightown Road Bridge, WA39	Building Sites, WA126
Industry in East Antrim, WA231	Bus Safety, WA50
Industry Sector Employment, WA233–4	Business Class Flights, WA126
Invest NI, WA42, WA336–7, WA337, WA337–40, WA340–1	Cars Registered, WA45
Local SMEs: Incentives, WA239	Church Street, Ballymena, WA126
Locally Produced Food, WA38	Compost Collection Service, WA47–8
Long-Term Unemployment Figures, WA232–3	Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA351–2
Lough Neagh Partnership, WA231–2	Crumlin Glen Project, WA127
New Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen, WA230	Department Correspondence, WA127
New Jobs in West Belfast and Shankill Areas, WA237–8	Department Wages, WA44
NI and ROI Economy, WA240	Department Websites, WA243
Northern Ireland Produce, WA37, WA38	Departmental Land, WA48
People with Disabilities, WA42	Departmental Spending, WA47
Petrol Service Station Closures, WA42	District Councils, WA49
Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA238	Dog Fouling, WA131
Private Sector Deal, WA36–7	Driver Vehicle Testing Agency, WA51, WA244, WA245
Pump Water Storage System at Camlough, WA229–30	Driving Instructor Identification, WA244–5
Radox Manufacturing and Research Facility, WA348–9	Driving Licences, WA47
Reconnect Scheme, WA347	Driving License Applications, WA241
Regional Tourism Partnerships, WA239	Dual Mandates, WA126
	Emergency Planning Grant, WA242–3
	Enforcement Cases, WA43
	Environment and Heritage Service, WA127
	Environmental Protection Agency, WA240
	EU Funding, WA245
	Fast Food Applications, WA46

Foreign Road Users, WA44
Fuel Poverty, WA128
Glass Bottles, WA50
Greenbelt Company, WA128
Grouse Population, WA245–6, WA246
Habitat on Millstone Mountain, WA354–5
Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences, WA350
Illegal Dumping, WA128, WA241–2
Illegal Waste Sites, WA354
Infringement of Signage Regulations, WA350
Landfill Sites, WA49–50, WA246
Larne Marina, WA43
Leylandii Hedges, WA45
Litter Free Zones, WA129–30
Media Monitoring, WA245
Mill Pond in Castlewellan, WA354, WA355–6
Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA49
New Councils, WA241
New Local Councils, WA350
Northern Ireland Water, WA46, WA355
Off-Sales, WA45
People with Disabilities, WA127
Planning Applications, WA43, WA44, WA45,
WA47, WA50, WA50–1, WA130, WA130–1,
WA240, WA244, WA246
Planning Approvals, WA43
Planning Law, WA49
Planning Legislation, WA126
Planning Policy Statement 14, WA353
Planning Service Recruitment, WA246
Planning Service, WA45, WA128
Plastic Bags, WA51–2
Pollution Incidents in the Three Milewater
River, WA353–4
Publicity and Advertising Spending, WA127
Recent Pollution in Crumlin River, WA355
Recycling Targets, WA48
Reduction of Councils, WA241
Redundancies and Pension Rights, WA241
Reform of Planning System, WA243–4
Renewable Energy Developments, WA129
Scottish Marine Bill, WA241
Sea Pollution, WA51
Seaweed in Ards Peninsula, WA244, WA245
Sick Leave, WA46
Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA47
Strangford Lough, WA350–1
Stress-Related Illness, WA241, WA246–7
Traffic Accidents, WA354
Tree Preservation Orders, WA45–6, WA46,
WA48, WA126
Vacant Industrial Buildings, WA44
Voltage Power Lines, WA47
Waste Water Treatment Works, WA127
Wind Farm Applications, WA129
Wind Farms, WA51
Wind Turbines, WA129
Work from Home, WA49

Finance and Personnel
Advice Centre, WA55
Broken and Stolen Electrical Equipment, WA356
Budget Spending Plans, WA58
Business Class Flights, WA133
Civil Servants Seeking Transfer, WA356–7
Civil Service Commuter Statistics, WA247
Claims of Discrimination, WA52–3
Composition of Civil Service Staff, WA357–8
Cross-Border Mobility, WA57
Department Websites, WA247
Departmental Correspondence, WA133–4
Departmental Funding, WA58
Departmental Land, WA133
Distribution of Jobs, WA56
Equal Pay, WA248
Equality Impact Assessments, WA132
Executive's Review of Rating, WA56
Expenditure on Consultants, WA133
Financial Services Industry, WA55–6
Ground Rents, WA131
Industrial De-rating, WA54
Inheritance Tax, WA359
Interreg IV Funding, WA58
Land Disposals, WA55
Local Produce, WA58
Ministerial Directions, WA58
New Computers, WA132–3
Non-Domestic Ratepayers, WA53–4, WA54–5
Overhead Power Lines, WA55
Peace III Expenditure, WA57
Peace III Programme, WA248
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA57
Publicity and Advertising, WA356
Rate Relief, WA57–8
Rates Debt, WA57
Renewable Energy, WA248
Sick Leave, WA55
Staff Absence, WA247–8
Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA356
Staff Working from Home, WA55
Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin
Hospital, WA357
Stress-Related Illness, WA358–9
Unpaid Rates, WA131–2
Varney II Report, WA56
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Accident and Emergency Ambulances, WA363
Accident and Emergency Vehicles, WA62–4,
WA67–9, WA69–71
After-School Groups, WA249–50
Agenda for Change Process, WA147
Alcohol and Drug Misuse, WA83–4
Ambulance Cover, WA74–5, WA82
Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, WA60
Arthritis, WA61
Asbestosis, WA61
At Home Nursing Care, WA264–5

Attacks on Causeway Hospital Staff, WA359
 Attacks on Staff, WA134
 Attempted Suicide Aftercare, WA252
 Attempted Suicide Hospital Admissions, WA252–3
 Bangor Hospital, WA364
 Belfast Health Action Zone, WA249
 Blind Registration, WA141
 Breast Screening Units, WA141–2
 Budget Allocation, WA71–2, WA72, WA72–3
 Business Class Flights, WA135
 Cervical Cancer Figures, WA250
 Child Protection, WA263
 Childcare Services, WA135–8, WA138–41
 Children’s Fund Projects, WA253–9
 Clostridium Difficile, WA369
 Closure of Hospital Wards, WA367–8, WA368
 Community and Voluntary Sector, WA78–80, WA80
 Community Nurses, WA142
 Community Psychiatric Nurses, WA73
 Consultants Vacancy, WA80
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA367
 Daisy Hill Hospital, WA59
 Dementia Services, WA261
 Dental Care, WA81
 Dental Graduates, WA77–8, WA78
 Dental Service, WA134, WA361, WA361–2, WA364–5
 Dental Students, WA146–7
 Dentist Records, WA261–2
 Department Correspondence, WA144
 Department Websites, WA260
 Departmental Land, WA134, WA143
 Departmental Legal Costs, WA262
 DHSSPS Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA84
 Diabetes, WA61, WA142, WA266
 Diabetic Ketoacidosis, WA76–7
 Director of Public Health, WA81
 Discretionary Student Incentive Scheme, WA260
 Disinfection Mats, WA61
 Domestic Violence, WA74
 Drug Addiction, WA83
 Drug and Alcohol Dependencies, WA84
 Eating Disorder Assistance, WA262
 Efficiency Targets, WA83
 Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon, WA263
 Epilepsy Sufferers, WA141
 Family Planning Clinics, WA249
 Fire and Ambulance Service, WA360
 Fire and Rescue Appliances, WA143
 Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles, WA360
 Fire Service Appliances, WA146
 Fire Stations, WA142
 Flattened Head Syndrome, WA62, WA259
 Forster Green Development, WA252
 Fraud, WA260–1
 Free Personal Care, WA144, WA146, WA264
 General Practitioner Surgery, WA59
 Genito-Urinary Medicine, WA144
 Graduate Dentists, WA73, WA144
 Health Service Dental Practices, WA265
 Health Service Dental Treatment, WA84–5
 Health Service Dentists, WA81, WA81–2
 Health Service Neurologists, WA141
 Health Service Pay Levels, WA368
 Healthcare in Prisons and Middletown Centre for Autism, WA263–4
 Heart Disease, WA62
 High Dependency Unit, WA60, WA60–1
 Hip Replacements, WA141, WA145–6
 Home-Help and Domiciliary Care Workers, WA368–9
 Hospital Plans, WA145
 Hospitals: Capital Expenditure, WA251
 Independent Sector, WA144
 Internet Content, WA252
 Lisanelly Site, WA148
 Local Commissioning Groups, WA82, WA260
 Magnetic Resonance Imaging, WA80
 Malnutrition Statistics, WA262
 Medical Secretaries, WA62
 Mental Health, WA141
 Mental-Health and Learning-Disability Funding for Children, WA251–2
 Mental-Health Patient Complaints, WA253
 Middletown Centre for Autism, WA264
 Minor Injuries Unit, WA73
 Myasthenia Gravis Disease, WA360
 National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, WA365–6
 Newry Ambulance Station, WA85
 NHS Dental Services, WA75, WA75–6, WA76
 Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, WA267, WA268
 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, WA250–1
 Number of Alcoholics, WA83
 Number of Ambulances, WA65–7
 Nurses Vacancy, WA80
 Nursing/Residential Home Residents, WA267
 Occupational Therapists, WA142
 Operation Cancellations, WA250
 Outpatient Clinic Appointments, WA77
 Parental Disciplining, WA73
 Pellet Guns, WA73–4
 People with Disabilities, WA142
 Physiotherapists Employed in Health and Social Care, WA250
 Physiotherapy Services, WA266
 Practising Dentists, WA359–60, WA360
 Priorities for Action 2008/09, WA367
 Public Inquiry into Mrs McGinley’s Death, WA360–1
 Public Procurement Procedures, WA261
 Public Toilets in Hospitals, WA145

Publicity and Advertising, WA143–4
 Regional Hospital, WA145
 Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, WA146
 Regulation of Pharmacies, WA265
 Residential Care, WA147
 Respite Care Facility in Quarry Lane, Dungannon, WA368
 Review of Support Provision for Carers, WA268
 Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients, WA263
 Royal Victoria Hospital, WA60, WA61, WA145, WA266–7, WA267, WA268
 Rural Proofing, WA59–60
 Search and Rescue Services, WA74
 Service Framework Development, WA262
 Sexually Transmitted Diseases, WA248–9
 Smoke Free, WA147–8
 Smoking Cessation Programmes, WA148
 South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, WA142
 South Eastern Trust Plans, WA250
 Speech and Language Therapists, WA147
 Staff Absence, WA82, WA83
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA78
 Stoma and Incontinence Appliances, WA249
 Stress-Related Illness, WA362–3
 Suicide Prevention Strategy, WA71
 Suicide Prevention, WA146
 Sun Bed Regulations, WA363
 Supporting People Programme, WA71
 Teenage Pregnancies, WA134–5
 Tobacco Products, WA145
 Transfer of Legal Files, WA261
 Ulster Hospital, WA84
 Vacant Consultant Posts, WA363–4, WA364
 Visually Impaired, WA261
 Voluntary and Community Groups, WA144
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results, WA250
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Belfast Trust, WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Northern Trust, WA367
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: South Eastern Trust, WA365
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Southern Trust, WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Western Trust, WA366
 Waterside Hospital, WA265
 Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease, WA59
 Work from Home, WA260
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Assembly Questions, WA1
 Business Class Flights, WA107
 Causes of Poverty, WA285
 Child Poverty Strategy 2020, WA176–7
 Children in Severe Poverty, WA173
 Civic Forum, WA3, WA5, WA286
 Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, WA107
 Constitutional Reform Bill, WA6
 Department Websites, WA177–8
 Departmental Land, WA3
 Disability Action Proposed Relocation, WA181
 Disadvantaged Children, WA106–7
 Drumcree/Garvaghy Road, WA182–3
 Equal Rights and Social Need Division, WA183–4
 Ethnic Minorities, WA7
 Extended Schools Funding, WA178
 Fair Employment Laws, WA286
 Family Information Group, WA2
 Foreign Head of State Visits, WA174, WA174–5
 Freedom of Information, WA1
 Fuel and Food Costs, WA178–9, WA179
 Funding for Children’s Issues, WA178
 Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence, WA175–6
 Gender Equality Strategy, WA2–3
 Good Relations District Council Plans, WA285
 Good Relations Indicators, WA180
 Government Advertising, WA6
 Government Arrangements since Devolution, WA180
 Hate Crime, WA182
 Integrated Development Fund, WA177
 Interface Projects and Funding, WA175
 Investment Strategy 2008–2018, WA3
 Joint Ministerial Committee, WA183
 Loughry Police Training College, WA178
 Maze/Long Kesh Site, WA181–2
 Meeting Requests, WA173
 Ministry of Defence Sites, WA5
 Paramilitary Flags, WA107–8
 Partnership Body, WA3
 Planning Appeals Commission Procedures, WA1–2
 Planning Appeals Commission, WA4, WA5–6
 Post-Primary Transfer, WA105
 Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183
 Public Service Agreement 7, WA179–80
 Publication Spending, WA173–4
 Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve, WA105
 Sectarianism, WA4
 Sexual Orientation Issues, WA173
 Single Equality Bill, WA1, WA7
 Social Inequality, WA176
 Staff Absence, WA105–6
 Stress-Related Illness, WA177
 Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA180–1
 Sustainable Development Forum, WA285–6
 Sustainable Development Strategy, WA176
 Telephone Calls, WA173
 Victims and Survivors, WA105
 Victims’ Commissioners, WA1, WA7, WA181

Website Review, WA4–5
 Work from Home, WA106
 Regional Development
 A2 Road Widening Schemes, WA378–9
 A3 Road from Portadown, WA156
 A4 Road Works, WA92
 Airport Car Parking, WA269
 Ambulance Travel, WA90
 Ards Borough Council Area, WA152–3
 Ballagh and Cortynan Crossings, WA88
 Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry Service, WA373
 Ballymoney Railway Station, WA158
 Belfast Marathon, WA153
 Blue Badges for the Disabled, WA379
 Bus Service, WA148
 Bus Station, WA154
 Business Class Flights, WA279
 Car Clubs, WA93
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA377
 Cycle Paths, WA149
 Department Websites, WA270
 Departmental Land, WA87–8, WA89–90, WA149
 Departmental Publications, WA269
 Departmental Spending, WA89
 Disability Targets, WA278
 Disabled Parking, WA151, WA156, WA274, WA278
 Disused Culverts, WA148
 DRD Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA93
 Emerald Fund, WA156–7
 Enterprise Rail Link, WA92
 Equality Legislation, WA272
 EU Funding, WA274
 Executive Office in Brussels, WA157
 Foyle Connect Project, WA268
 Frances Street, Newtownards, WA88
 Free Travel Over 60s, WA278–9
 Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme, WA158
 Glenariff Road, WA88
 Hydrogen Technology for Buses, WA276–7
 Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services, WA94, WA95
 Independent Water Review Panel, WA94
 Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works, WA87
 Land Abandonment, WA91
 Meeting Times, WA153
 Millennium Way Phase 2, WA156
 Newcastle to Hilltown Road, WA88
 North Down Borough Council Area, WA153–4
 Northern Ireland Railways, WA87, WA154
 Northern Ireland Water, WA151–2
 Northern Ireland’s Railway Service, WA158
 Parking in Belfast, WA270–1, WA271, WA271–2
 Parking Schemes, WA155
 Parking Tickets, WA86–7, WA149, WA274
 Passing Bays on the Carrowclare Road, WA370–1
 People with Disabilities, WA150
 Plant Equipment, WA87
 Public Road Maintenance, WA269
 Rail Accidents, WA268
 Rail Services, WA277, WA279
 Railway Halt in Ballykelly, WA88–9
 Residents’ Parking Schemes, WA157
 Road Accidents, WA86
 Road and Water Plans in Crumlin, WA273
 Road and Water Plans in Mallusk, WA273–4
 Road and Water Plans in Randalstown, WA273
 Road Bridges, WA85–6, WA86
 Road Maintenance Allocations, WA369
 Road Safety, WA86
 Road Safety Issues, WA279
 Road Safety Measures in Donaghadee, WA378
 Road Safety Measures in Millisle, WA377–8
 Road Schemes, WA149–50
 Road Side Memorials, WA155
 Road Works Projects, WA275–6
 Roads Service Safer Roads, WA90
 Rock Excavation, WA279–80
 Rural Transport Fund, WA157
 Sale of Land, WA91
 Senior SmartPass Holders, WA90, WA90–1
 Sewerage System, WA93–4
 Sewerage Works, WA156
 Signage for Drivers in Fountain Hill, Derry/Londonderry, WA376
 SmartPass Fares, WA279
 Speed Limits, WA269–70
 Springhill Shopping Centre, WA91–2, WA92
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA91
 Street Lighting, WA157
 Stress-Related Illness, WA371–3, WA378
 Tarmacking of Roads, WA272, WA272–3
 Thompson Solutions, WA151
 Ticketing System, WA150
 Toome Bypass, WA93
 Townland Names, WA371
 Traffic Calming Measures, WA275, WA375–6
 Traffic Calming Measures at Movilla Road, Newtownards, WA92–3
 Traffic Calming Measures in North Down, WA370
 Traffic Congestion in Waringstown, WA276
 Traffic Flow, WA270
 Translink Buses, WA370
 Ulsterbus Goldline Express, WA94
 Ulsterbus, WA376
 Unlawful Signage, WA369
 Vandalism to Railway and Bus Stations, WA276
 Walking to School, WA155
 Water and Roads Service, WA277, WA373–5
 Water Meters, WA93, WA376
 Water Preservation, WA154
 Water Pressure, WA157
 Water Rates, WA154
 Water Supply, WA153
 Work from Home, WA149

Social Development

Alley Gating, WA383, WA383–4, WA384
Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme, WA97
Areas at Risk Programme, WA103–4
Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee, WA384
Benefit Take-Up, WA169
Bonfire Funding, WA168
Business Class Flights, WA155, WA159–60
Common Housing Selection Scheme, WA98
Communication with Farset, WA167
Community Support Programme, WA383
Connswater Housing, WA281
Conor Rise and Conor House, WA280
Co-Ownership Housing Association, WA379, WA384, WA385, WA387
Co-Ownership Schemes, WA100, WA101, WA102, WA160, WA162, WA170
Council District, WA100
Departmental Land, WA160, WA162, WA380–1, WA381–3
Departmental Legal Costs, WA280–1
Departmental Publications, WA280
Departmental Websites, WA281
Disability Living Allowance, WA97, WA159, WA160
Disability Targets, WA282
Disabled Access in Victoria Square, WA379
Disabled Facilities Grant, WA282
Draft Social Housing Development Programme, WA101
DSD Funding for Counselling Services, WA99, WA99–100
DSD Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA101–2
Eastvale Avenue Housing Estate, WA96
Energy Performance Certificates, WA97
Environmental Improvement Schemes, WA167–8
EU Funding, WA168
Festival Funding, WA161–2
Fuel Allowance, WA158
Fuel Poverty, WA170
Fuel Prices, WA381
Gambling Regulations, WA170–1
Green Spaces, WA167
Heating Replacement Programme, WA103
Heating Systems, WA167
Homeless People, WA169
Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in Limavady, WA384
Hostel Accommodation in Newtownards, WA384
Housing Associations, WA163, WA165
Housing Executive, WA96–7, WA97, WA98, WA160, WA162–3, WA163, WA163–4, WA165, WA165–6, WA166, WA168, WA379
Housing Executive Expenditure, WA102
Housing Executive Land in East Antrim, WA281–2
Housing Executive Tenants, WA384
Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget, WA386
Housing Priorities, WA170
Housing Selection Scheme, WA169
Housing Waiting Lists, WA164, WA379–80
Incapacity Benefit, WA100
Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, WA386–7
Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane, WA387–8, WA388
Legislation to Protect Caravan Owners, WA388
Ligoniel Improvement Association, WA103
Liquor Licensing Laws, WA101
Local Community Fund, WA385
Modernisation Fund, WA158–9, WA283
Modernisation Fund Capital Programme, WA162
National Carers' Strategy, WA283
NI Housing Executive, WA280
Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association, WA103
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, WA102
Official Meetings, WA101
Off-Road Bikes, WA103
Redevelopment of the Strabane Jobs and Benefits Agency, WA389
Regional Infrastructure Programme, WA167
Renewable Energy, WA283
Renewing Communities Fund, WA102–3, WA282
Replacement Grants, WA385–6
Rural Proofing, WA97
Social Housing, WA160–1
Social Housing Accommodation, WA161
Social Security Agency, WA103
Staff Sickness, WA169
Stress-Related Illness, WA383
Supported Housing Schemes, WA95–6
Supported Living Schemes, WA95
Town Centres, WA169–70
Travellers' Sites, WA164
Underage and Public Drinking, WA101
Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA171
Urban Regeneration, WA101, WA164–5
Warm Homes Scheme, WA168
Water Charges, WA168
Winter Fuel Payments, WA387
Wood Pellet Boilers, WA167
Work from Home, WA167
Youth Workers, WA98, WA159
Yellow Pages, WA283–4
Youth Club Leaders in the Foyle Constituency, WA315
Youth Workers, WA29, WA98, WA115, WA159, WA202–3
Zoned Land, WA125

PART II (MEMBERS' INDEX)

Adams, Mr G

- Private Members' Business
- Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 20, 21

Anderson, Ms M

- Committee Business
- Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 328
- Oral Answers
- Culture, Arts and Leisure
- Support Structure for Museums, 340
- Employment and Learning
- University Capacity and Student Demand, 343
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
- Binge Drinking, 145
- Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 145
- Public Housing Stock, 153
- Private Members' Business
- Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 98
- Written Answers
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
- Invest NI, WA336, WA337, WA337, WA340
- Finance and Personnel
- Composition of Civil Service Staff, WA357
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
- Investment Strategy 2008–2018, WA3
- Social Inequality, WA176
- Regional Development
- Foyle Connect Project, WA268

Armstrong, Mr B

- Executive Committee Business
- Consideration Stage, 81
- Further Consideration Stage, 188
- Written Answers
- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Lindsay Hall Facility at Loughry College, WA288
- Regional Development
- Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry Service, WA373
- Social Development
- Homeless People, WA169

Attwood, Mr A

- Executive Committee Business
- Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
- Final Stage, 265, 265–6, 266, 269
- Oral Answers
- Culture, Arts and Leisure
- Support Structure for Museums, 340
- Education
- European Language Portfolio, 349
- Employment and Learning
- Stranmillis University College: Merger, 345

Social Development

- Shared Future Housing, 157

Private Members' Business

- Aggregates Mapping Programme, 108
- Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 43–4, 45
- Extended Schools Funding, 379, 380

Written Answers

- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
- Sectarianism, WA4

Beggs, Mr R

Committee Business

- Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 326–7

Committee Stage

- Committee for Finance and Personnel
- Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS3, CS3–4, CS14, CS15, CS16, CS21, CS31, CS32, CS33, CS34, CS35, CS36, CS38, CS42, CS43, CS44, CS48

Executive Committee Business

- Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
- Consideration Stage, 56, 56–7, 57, 58, 64, 74, 76, 86, 87, 87–8
- Further Consideration Stage, 184–5, 185, 186, 190
- Final Stage, 204–5, 209, 201

Oral Answers

- Finance and Personnel
- Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
- Binge Drinking, 144, 145
- Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 145

Private Members' Business

- Extended Schools Funding, 374–5
- Post-Primary Transfer, 277

Written Answers

- Education
- After-School Clubs, WA203
- Children and Young People's Funding Package, WA201
- Implementation of Inclusion Agenda, WA209
- Mobile Classrooms, WA197, WA301
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
- Eco-Tourist Activities, WA237
- Electricity Generators, WA36
- Environment
- Average Levels of Debt, WA352
- Finance and Personnel
- Claims of Discrimination, WA52
- Rates Debt, WA57
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
- Childcare Services, WA135, WA138
- Mental-Health and Learning-Disability

Funding for Children, WA251
Office of the First and deputy First Minister
Extended Schools Funding, WA178
Funding for Children's Issues, WA178
Regional Development
Sewerage Works, WA156
Social Development
Benefit Take-Up, WA169
Co-Ownership Housing Association, WA379

Boylan, Mr C

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 255
Libraries Bill
Consideration Stage, 181
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 56
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Farmed Animals: Welfare, 223
Education
European Language Portfolio, 350
Environment
Armagh Observatory, 28, 29
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 107–8
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Closure of Hospital Wards, WA367, WA368
Social Development
Areas at Risk Programme, WA103–4

Boylan, Mr C (as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment)

Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Final Stage, 204

Bradley, Mr D

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 245–6
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 329–30
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 224
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Language Issues, 339
Education
Selection at Age 14, 353
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Action Renewables Programme, 228
Environment
Armagh Observatory, 29
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 368–70, 370, 371
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
Tyrone, 293–4, 294

Post-Primary Transfer, 272–3, 283–4
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Irish Language, WA112, WA193
Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA193
Irish Language and Ulster-Scots, WA299
Education
School Transport, WA16
Environment
Greenbelt Company, WA128
Finance and Personnel
Land Disposals, WA55
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Newry Ambulance Station, WA85
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ministry of Defence Sites, WA5
Regional Development
Disabled Parking, WA156
Rock Excavation, WA279

Bradley, Mr PJ

Ministerial Statement
North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
Policy and Rural Development, 250
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
Ireland, 4–5
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Communication with the Fishing Industry, 222
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Animal Carcasses, WA185
Cod Fishing Industry, WA109
Fallen Stock Carcasses, WA192
Farm Animals, WA109
Interest Paid to Livestock Owners, WA293
Single Farm Payment Applications, WA293
Education
Kindle Integrated Primary School, WA210,
WA211, WA212, WA217
St Colman's College, WA15–16
Environment
Traffic Accidents, WA354

Bradley, Mrs M

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 235
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Increase in Gas Prices, 228
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Older People, 24
Regional Development
Waterside Railway Station, 148–9, 149
Social Development

Public Housing Stock, 153
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 378
Post-Primary Transfer, 277–8
Written Answers
Education
Primary School Funding, WA327
Employment and Learning
St Mary's University College, WA335
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Residential Care, WA147

Brady, Mr M

Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Performing Right Society, 341
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Increase in Gas Prices, 228–9
Environment
Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33
Finance and Personnel
Rates Relief for over 70s, 38
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Stroke Strategy, 144
Regional Development
Free Travel: Delay, 150
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Euro-Friendly Businesses, WA39

Bresland, Mr A

Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Administration Costs, 224
Culture, Arts and Leisure
2010 Quarter-centenary of the Plantation of
Ulster, 342, 343
Employment and Learning
Skills in the Farming Community, 346
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Action Renewables Programme, 227
Environment
Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 30
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Focus Farm Scheme, WA110, WA184
Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme, WA288
Rural Development Programme, WA184–5
Sub Regional Community Networks, WA287,
WA288
Education
Donemana Primary School, WA318
Falling Pupil Numbers, WA330
Finance and Personnel
Interreg IV Funding, WA58
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Hip Replacements, WA145–6
Social Development

Local Community Fund, WA385
Modernisation Fund, WA158–9

Brolly, Mr F

Adjournment
Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry,
312–13
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Administration Costs, 224
Regional Development
Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 148
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 109–10
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
Tyrone, 289
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Irish Language Groups, WA299
Education
Creative Youth Partnerships, WA326

Browne, Lord

Written Answers
Finance and Personnel
Ministerial Directions, WA58
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Daisy Hill Hospital, WA59
Ulster Hospital, WA84
Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease, WA59

Buchanan, Mr T

Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Stroke Strategy, 144
Private Members' Business
Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 97,
98, 100

Burns, Mr T

Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Bluetongue, 221
Education
School Crossing, 351
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Bluetongue, WA191
Colony Collapse Disorder, WA288
Education
Parkhall College, WA20
School Transport, WA20
Sure Start Programme, WA32, WA116, WA199
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Hightown Road Bridge, WA39
Local SMEs: Incentives, WA239
Radox Manufacturing and Research Facility,
WA3489

Environment
Crumlin Glen Project, WA127
Northern Ireland Water, WA355
Recent Pollution in Crumlin River, WA355
Finance and Personnel
Non-Domestic Ratepayers, WA54
Unpaid Rates, WA131
Broken and Stolen Electrical Equipment, WA356
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Fire and Ambulance Service, WA360
Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles, WA360
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Single Equality Bill, WA7
Regional Development
Road and Water Plans in Crumlin, WA273
Road and Water Plans in Mallusk, WA273–4
Road and Water Plans in Randalstown, WA273
Toome Bypass, WA93
Ulsterbus Goldline Express, WA94

Burnside, Mr D

Assembly Business, 1, 119
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 122
Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 6–7
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Derry City Football Club, 340
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Changed Economic Environment, 231
Environment
Road Safety: Advertisements, 32
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Consultation, 24, 25
Social Development
Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155
Private Members' Business
Review of Business Bureaucracy, 12, 16
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Balmoral Show, WA192
Employment and Learning
Liaison Work with DEL, WA224
Finance and Personnel
Renewable Energy, WA248
Regional Development
Rural Transport Fund, WA157

Butler, Mr P

Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Multi-Sports Stadium, 341, 342
Finance and Personnel

Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Consultation, 25
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 373–4
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Danny Blanchflower Complex, WA110
Irish Communication, WA111
Maze Stadium, WA113
Olympic Events, WA112–13
Re-Imaging Communities Programme, WA194
Sport NI, WA14
Support for Irish Language and GAA Organisations, WA193
Education
Balmoral High School, WA219, WA302
Independent Admission Exams, WA328
Social Mobility, WA15
Environment
District Councils, WA49
Planning Applications, WA43
Waste Water Treatment Works, WA127
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Pellet Guns, WA73
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Maze/Long Kesh Site, WA181–2
Social Development
Environmental Improvement Schemes, WA167–8
Green Spaces, WA167
Heating Replacement Programme, WA103
Heating Systems, WA167
Off-Road Bikes, WA103

Campbell, Mr G

Oral Answers
Regional Development
Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 147, 148
Social Development
Review of Public Administration, 154
Written Answers
Education
Behavioural Problems in Schools, WA331
Employment and Learning
Former Employees from Manufacturing Sector, WA334
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ethnic Minorities, WA7

Campbell, Mr G (as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development)

Committee Stage
Committee for Social Development
Charities Bill [NIA 9/07], CS25

Clarke, Mr T

- Executive Committee Business
 - Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 - Second Stage, 385
 - Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 - Further Consideration Stage, 188
- Ministerial Statement
 - North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 251
- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Bottled Water, 40
 - Environment
 - Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences, 34
- Written Answers
 - Education
 - Parkhall College, WA26

Clarke, Mr W

- Ministerial Statement
 - North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 250
- Oral Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - Skills in the Farming Community, 347
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Coastline Protection, WA9
 - Rivers Agency, WA10
 - Rural Post Offices, WA190
 - Environment
 - Habitat on Millstone Mountain, WA354
 - Mill Pond in Castlewellan, WA354, WA355–6
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Search and Rescue Services, WA74
 - Tobacco Products, WA145
 - Regional Development
 - Newcastle to Hilltown Road, WA88
 - Social Development
 - Housing Selection Scheme, WA169

Cobain, Mr F

- Oral Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Sporting Excellence, 338
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 217
 - Regional Development
 - Bus Lanes, 152
- Private Members' Business
 - Aggregates Mapping Programme, 105–6
- Written Answers
 - Social Development
 - Water Charges, WA168

Coulter, Rev Dr Robert

- Matters of the Day
 - Death of Robert Dunlop, 317–18
- Oral Answers
 - Environment
 - Dangerous Wild Animals, 29
 - Social Development
 - Shared Future Housing, 158
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Girona Collection, WA299
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Budget Spending Plans, WA58
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Smoke Free, WA147

Coulter, Rev Dr Robert (as a Representative of the Assembly Commission)

- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Assembly Chamber: Refurbishment, 39, 39–40
- Written Answers
 - Assembly Commission
 - Desks for Back-Bench MLAs, WA389
 - Events Held at Parliament Buildings, WA392
 - New Search Facility, WA284
 - Symbols and Emblems on Display in the Stormont Assembly Estate, WA389–92
 - Union Flag, WA171
 - Yellow Pages, WA283–4

Craig, Mr J

- Oral Answers
 - Education
 - South Eastern Education and Library Board, 352
- Written Answers
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Peace III Programme, WA248
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Community Nurses, WA142
 - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, WA142
 - Suicide Prevention, WA146
 - Social Development
 - Departmental Land, WA160
 - Festival Funding, WA161–2
 - Social Housing, WA160–1
 - Social Housing Accommodation, WA161

Cree, Mr L

- Executive Committee Business
 - Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 - Consideration Stage, 135, 135–6, 136
- Oral Answers
 - Environment
 - Armagh Observatory, 29
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Commissioner for Older People, 24

Private Members' Business
 Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 21, 22
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 11–12
 Sustainable Energy, 303–4, 310
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Agenda for Change Process, WA147
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Fuel and Food Costs, WA178

Dallat, Mr J
 Adjournment
 Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 314–15
 Oral Answers
 Education
 Paedophile Information Exchange, 348
 Regional Development
 Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 148
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Forestry Strategy, WA191–2
 Education
 School Curriculum, WA207
 Suspension of Children, WA208
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Energy Costs, WA237
 Environment
 Church Street, Ballymena, WA126
 Landfill Sites, WA246
 Infringement of Signage Regulations, WA350
 Finance and Personnel
 Advice Centre, WA55
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Fraud, WA260
 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, WA250–1
 Public Procurement Procedures, WA261
 Transfer of Legal Files, WA261
 Regional Development
 Airport Car Parking, WA269
 Road Safety Issues, WA279
 Social Development
 Housing Priorities, WA170

Dallat, Mr J (as Deputy Speaker)

Assembly Business
 British-Irish Council, 355
 Chairpersons/Deputy Chairpersons of Committees, 355
 North/South Ministerial Council, 355
 Committee Business
 Standing Committee Membership, 355
 Standing Orders, 90, 92
 Statutory Committee Membership, 355
 Executive Committee Business
 Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Further Consideration Stage, 195, 197, 199,

202, 203
 Final Stage, 254, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 263, 264, 265, 266, 268, 269
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 First Stage, 195
 Libraries Bill
 Consideration Stage, 179, 182, 183
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Further Consideration Stage, 184, 190, 192
 Final Stage, 207, 208
 Mesothelioma, etc., Bill
 First Stage, 355
 Matters of the Day
 Spamount Car Bomb, 247, 248
 Ministerial Statement
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 249
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Ban on Cameras, 41
 Finance and Personnel
 Stormont Events, 36
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Consultation, 26
 Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27, 28
 Private Members' Business
 Carer's Allowance Bill
 Second Stage, 193
 Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 42
 Extended Schools Funding, 367, 370, 371, 373
 Reclassification of Cannabis, 356, 359, 361, 362

Deeny, Dr K

Committee Business
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 323–4
 Oral Answers
 Regional Development
 A5 Upgrade, 151

Dodds, Mr N (as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment)

Executive Committee Business
 Insolvency (Disqualification from Office: General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 214
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Action Renewables Programme, 227, 227–8, 228
 Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 226, 226–7, 227
 Biofuels, 229, 229–30, 230
 Changed Economic Environment, 230, 231
 Increase in Gas Prices, 228, 229
 Private Members' Business
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 14–16, 16
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

2012 Olympic Games, WA341
 Action Renewables and Job Growth, WA226
 Biofuels, WA39
 Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Industries,
 WA124–5
 Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors,
 WA234, WA342
 Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine,
 WA342
 Business Class Flights, WA336
 Business Units, WA125
 Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA342–46
 Corporation Tax Review, WA239–40
 Department Websites, WA229
 Departmental Land, WA124, WA347
 Domestic Tourism, WA228
 Economically Active, WA42
 Economically Inactive, WA40, WA40–1
 Eco-Tourist Activities, WA237
 Electricity Generators, WA36
 Electronic Distribution of Publications, WA43
 Employee Jobs by Industry, WA230–1
 Employment Figures, WA347–8
 Energy Costs, WA237
 Environment and Renewable Energy Fund,
 WA36
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA224
 Euro-Friendly Businesses, WA39
 European Sustainable Competitiveness
 Operational Programme, WA346, WA346–7
 Export-Orientated Small Firms, WA235–7
 Gas Prices, WA40
 Growth in Industry Sectors, WA233
 Hightown Road Bridge, WA39
 Industry in East Antrim, WA231
 Industry Sector Employment, WA233–4
 Invest NI, WA336–7, WA337, WA337–40,
 WA340–1, WA42
 Local SMEs: Incentives, WA239
 Locally Produced Food, WA38
 Long-Term Unemployment Figures, WA232–3
 Lough Neagh Partnership, WA231–2
 New Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen,
 WA230
 New Jobs in West Belfast and Shankill Areas,
 WA238
 NI and ROI Economy, WA240
 Northern Ireland Produce, WA37, WA38
 People with Disabilities, WA42
 Petrol Service Station Closures, WA42
 Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA238
 Private Sector Deal, WA36–7
 Pump Water Storage System at Camlough,
 WA229–30
 Radox Manufacturing and Research Facility,
 WA348–9
 Reconnect Scheme, WA347
 Regional Tourism Partnerships, WA239
 Renewable Energy, WA237, WA238–9,

WA347, WA348
 Renewable Energy Targets, WA225–6, WA226
 Single Electricity Market, WA225
 Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, WA234–5
 Sports and Tourism, WA238
 St Patrick's Day Celebrations, WA349
 St Patrick's Trail, WA224
 Staff Working from Home, WA42
 Stress-Related Illness, WA227
 Sustainable Competitiveness Programme,
 WA231
 Sustainable Development Strategy, WA226–7
 Thompson Solutions, WA40
 Tourism, WA240
 Tourist Board Advertising, WA37
 Tourist Board Promotion, WA232
 Tourist Board, WA39
 Unemployment Rates, WA41
 Village Tourism, WA38
 Visitors to Northern Ireland, WA227, WA228
 Wind Turbines, WA225
 Zoned Land, WA125

Doherty, Mr P

Ministerial Statement

Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
 Ireland, 4
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
 Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
 Policy and Rural Development, 251

Oral Answers

Finance and Personnel
 Peace II Extension, 34

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 International Practical Shooting Sports, WA14
 Awards for All Funding, WA14
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Zoned Land, WA125
 Environment
 Ballycolman Sewage Pumping Station, WA355
 Planning Applications, WA130
 Social Development
 Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane, WA387,
 WA388
 Modernisation Fund Capital Programme,
 WA162
 Redevelopment of the Strabane Jobs and
 Benefits Agency, WA389

Donaldson, Mr J (as junior Minister in the Office of the First and deputy First Minister)

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Consideration Stage, 124, 125, 129, 131, 139–40,
 140, 140–1, 141, 141–2, 142, 159, 161, 163,
 164, 165, 167, 169, 171, 172, 172–3, 173, 174
 Final Stage, 258, 260, 263, 264, 266–7, 268,
 269, 269–70

Durkan, Mr M

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 123–4, 124, 130, 131,
136–7, 137, 137–8, 138, 139

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 227

Written Answers

Education

Minor Works Capital Scheme, WA219
Youth Club Leaders in the Foyle
Constituency, WA315

Employment and Learning

University of Ulster Computer Training
Officers, WA333

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Export-Orientated Small Firms, WA235
Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, WA234

Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants Seeking Transfer, WA356
Civil Service Commuter Statistics, WA247
Departmental Funding, WA58

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

At Home Nursing Care, WA264
Free Personal Care, WA264
Mental-Health Patient Complaints, WA253
National Institute for Health and Clinical
Excellence, WA365
Priorities for Action 2008/09, WA367
Stoma and Incontinence Appliances, WA249
Waterside Hospital, WA265

Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister

Family Information Group, WA2

Regional Development

Free Travel Over 60s, WA278
Signage for Drivers in Fountain Hill, Derry/
Londonderry, WA376

Social Development

Modernisation Fund, WA283

Easton, Mr A

Committee Business

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 324–5

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment,
98–9, 99, 100, 103
Reclassification of Cannabis, 357–8

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Equality Impact Assessments, WA108
Funds surrendered in the EU Agrienvironment
budget, WA188

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Equality Impact Assessments, WA111
EU Funding, WA295

Education

Donaghadee High School, WA18, WA119,
WA120, WA205, WA206, WA311

Equality Impact Assessments, WA116

Grammar School Entrance Exams, WA207,
WA316, WA317

Grammar Schools, WA317

Travel Time to Schools, WA311

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Equality Impact Assessments, WA224

Environment

Bicycle Proficiency Test, WA354

Cars Registered, WA45

Departmental Spending, WA47

EU Funding, WA245

Litter Free Zones, WA129

New Councils, WA241

New Local Councils, WA350

Finance and Personnel

Financial Services Industry, WA55

Equality Impact Assessments, WA132

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Arthritis, WA61

Asbestosis, WA61

Bangor Hospital, WA364

Blind Registration, WA141

Budget Allocation, WA71, WA72

Cervical Cancer Figures, WA250

Consultants Vacancy, WA80

DHSSPS Spend on EQIA and Consultations,
WA84

Diabetes, WA61

Director of Public Health, WA81

Epilepsy Sufferers, WA141

Family Planning Clinics, WA249

Flattened Head Syndrome, WA62, WA259

Genito-Urinary Medicine, WA144

Health Service Neurologists, WA141

Heart Disease, WA62

Hip Replacements, WA141

Independent Sector, WA144

Magnetic Resonance Imaging, WA80

Mental Health, WA141

Nurses Vacancy, WA80

Nursing/Residential Home Residents, WA267

Operation Cancellations, WA250

Physiotherapists Employed in Health and
Social Care, WA250

Sexually Transmitted Diseases, WA248–9

South Eastern Trust Plans, WA250

Vacant Consultant Posts, WA363, WA364

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results, WA250

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Belfast
Trust, WA366

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:
Northern Trust, WA367

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: South
Eastern Trust, WA365

Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:

Southern Trust, WA366
Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:
Western Trust, WA366
Regional Development
Departmental Spending, WA89
EU Funding, WA274
Parking in Belfast, WA270, WA271
Road Safety Measures in Donaghadee, WA378
Road Safety Measures in Millisle, WA377
Social Development
Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee, WA384
DSD Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA101
EU Funding, WA168
Housing Executive, WA168
Legislation to Protect Caravan Owners, WA388

Elliott, Mr T

Adjournment
Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 392
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 173, 173–4, 174, 174–5, 175
Further Consideration Stage, 201
Final Stage, 264
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 387, 388
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 59, 63, 63–4, 64
Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 4
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Administration Costs, 224
Education
School Crossing, 351–2
Environment
Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 218
Private Members' Business
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 289
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Bluetongue, WA292
New Tax on Conacre Land, WA291
Organic Food Production, WA292
Tesco Meat Range and Prices, WA292
Culture, Arts and Leisure
After-School Sports Activities, WA13
Education
Capital Building Programme, WA16
Education Village, WA28
Fire Prevention, WA113
Irish Language, WA18

Middletown Centre for Autism, WA218, WA219, WA308
Violence in Schools, WA203
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Petrol Service Station Closures, WA42
Economically Active, WA42
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Attacks on Staff, WA134
Healthcare in Prisons and Middletown Centre for Autism, WA263
Middletown Centre for Autism, WA264
Teenage Pregnancies, WA134
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Victims' Commissioners, WA1
Victims and Survivors, WA105
Regional Development
A4 Road Works, WA92
Road Bridges, WA85, WA86

Elliott, Mr T (as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development)

Ministerial Statement
North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 249–50

Empey, Sir Reg (as Minister for Employment and Learning)

Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Document Accessibility for Visually Impaired People, 348
Education Maintenance Allowance:
Absenteeism, 347, 347–8
Sign-Language Interpreting, 344, 344–5, 345
Skills in the Farming Community, 346, 347
Stranmillis University College: Merger, 345, 345–6, 346
University Capacity and Student Demand, 343, 344
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
All Ireland Employment, WA223
Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine, WA333
Careers Advice Service, WA33
College Merger, WA121
Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA333
Department Correspondence, WA122
Department Websites, WA223
Departmental Land, WA122
Departmental Legal Costs, WA222
Departmental Spending, WA124
Education Funding, WA121
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA334, WA335

Educational Targets, WA221–2
 English as a Foreign Language Courses,
 WA332, WA332–3
 Former Employees from Manufacturing
 Sector, WA334
 Further Education Campus, WA123–4
 Further Education Colleges, WA35
 Further Education Courses, WA123, WA124
 Further Education in Strabane, WA224
 Liaison Work with DEL, WA224
 Media Monitoring Expenditures, WA224
 Merger of Stranmillis College with Queen's
 University Belfast, WA335
 Migrant Workers, WA120–1
 Occupational Therapy Course, WA122
 Pathways to Work Programme, WA335
 People with Disabilities, WA121
 PhD Projects, WA35
 Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA334
 Proposed Merger, WA36
 Publicity and Advertising, WA222–3
 Skills Base, WA33
 South Eastern Regional College, WA334
 St Mary's University College, WA335
 Staff Absence, WA34–5
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA121
 Stranmillis University College, WA35,
 WA122–3, WA123
 Stress-Related Illness, WA222
 Training for Success Programme, WA335,
 WA336
 Undergraduate Drop-Out Cost, WA32–3
 University of Ulster Computer Training
 Officers, WA333
 Work from Home, WA122

Farry, Dr S

Committee Stage

Committee for Finance and Personnel
 Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill
 [NIA 11/07], CS5, CS6, CS13, CS22, CS35,
 CS46, CS49

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Further Consideration Stage, 199, 199–200, 200
 Final Stage, 255, 255–7, 257, 262
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 54, 55, 56, 60–2, 62,
 62–3, 67, 68, 69, 79, 82–3, 85, 86
 Final Stage, 205, 205–6

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Changed Economic Environment, 231

Private Members' Business

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 22, 43

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 Animal Welfare Legislation, WA187–8, WA188

Movement of Circuses, WA188
 Education
 Primary and Post-Primary School Figures,
 WA331
 Primary School Figures, WA332
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Corporation Tax Review, WA239–40
 Finance and Personnel
 Industrial De-rating, WA54
 Non-Domestic Ratepayers, WA53
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Sexual Orientation Issues, WA173
 Social Development
 Disabled Access in Victoria Square, WA379

Ford, Mr D

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Consideration Stage, 125, 141, 158–9, 159,
 159–60, 161–1, 161–2, 175
 Further Consideration Stage, 195–6, 199
 Final Stage, 253–4, 254, 258, 261–2, 262
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 Second Stage, 386
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 47–8, 48–50, 50–1, 64,
 68, 68–9, 69, 70, 78, 78–9, 79, 79–80, 84,
 85, 88, 89
 Further Consideration Stage, 187, 189, 190
 Final Stage, 211, 211–12

Matters of the Day

Spamont Car Bomb, 248

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
 Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
 Policy and Rural Development, 250–1

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Ban on Cameras, 40

Environment

Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 30–1

Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister

Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27

Social Development

Public Housing Stock, 154

Private Members' Business

Sustainable Energy, 304–5, 308

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agricultural Waste Energy, WA185

Biomass Energy, WA185

Education

Community Relations Core Funding Scheme,
WA196

Nursery Provision, WA27

Townland Names, WA16

Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Ballycolman Sewage Pumping Station, WA355
Action Renewables and Job Growth, WA226	Bicycle Proficiency Test, WA354
Renewable Energy, WA238	Bin Collection, WA49
Renewable Energy Targets, WA226	Bin Fine Policy, WA130
Sustainable Development Strategy, WA226	Building Sites, WA126
Environment	Bus Safety, WA50
Fuel Poverty, WA128	Business Class Flights, WA126
Sea Pollution, WA51	Cars Registered, WA45
Finance and Personnel	Church Street, Ballymena, WA126
Peace III Expenditure, WA57	Compost Collection Service, WA48
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA351–2
Government Arrangements since Devolution, WA180	Crumlin Glen Project, WA127
Sustainable Development Forum, WA285	Department Correspondence, WA127
Sustainable Development Strategy, WA176	Department Wages, WA44
Foster, Mrs A	Department Websites, WA243
Adjournment	Departmental Land, WA48
Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 390–1	Departmental Spending, WA47
Matters of the Day	District Councils, WA49
Spamont Car Bomb, 247	Dog Fouling, WA131
Private Members' Business	Driver Vehicle Testing Agency, WA244, WA245, WA51
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 289, 291, 295, 297–99	Driving Instructor Identification, WA245
Foster, Mrs A (as Minister of the Environment)	Driving Licences, WA47
Adjournment	Driving License Applications, WA241
Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 315–16	Dual Mandates, WA126
Executive Committee Business	Emergency Planning Grant, WA242–3
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill	Enforcement Cases, WA43
First Stage, 195	Environment and Heritage Service, WA127
Second Stage, 382, 382–3, 388–9	Environmental Protection Agency, WA240
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill	EU Funding, WA245
Consideration Stage, 64–7, 67, 68, 70, 83–4, 84–5, 85, 85–6, 86	Fast Food Applications, WA46
Further Consideration Stage, 190, 190–1, 191, 192	Foreign Road Users, WA44
Final Stage, 203–4, 212, 213	Fuel Poverty, WA128
Oral Answers	Glass Bottles, WA50
Environment	Greenbelt Company, WA128
Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 30, 31	Grouse Population, WA245–6, WA246
Armagh Observatory, 29	Habitat on Millstone Mountain, WA354–5
Dangerous Wild Animals, 29, 30	Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences, WA350
Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33	Illegal Dumping, WA128, WA241–2
Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences, 33, 34	Illegal Waste Sites, WA354
Planning Circular PC 03/07, 31, 31–2	Infringement of Signage Regulations, WA350
Road Safety: Advertisements, 32	Landfill Sites, WA49–50, WA246
World Heritage Sites and National Parks, 30	Larne Marina, WA43
Private Members' Business	Leylandii Hedges, WA45
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 110–11	Litter Free Zones, WA129–30
Sustainable Energy, 308, 308–10	Media Monitoring, WA245
Written Answers	Mill Pond in Castlewellan, WA354, WA356
Environment	Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA49
Ards and Down Area Plan, WA349, WA349–50	New Councils, WA241
Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry, WA51	New Local Councils, WA350
Average Levels of Debt, WA352–3	Northern Ireland Water, WA355, WA46
	Off-Sales, WA45
	People with Disabilities, WA127
	Planning Applications, WA43, WA44, WA45, WA47, WA50, WA50–1, WA130, WA130–1, WA240, WA244, WA246
	Planning Approvals, WA43
	Planning Law, WA49

Planning Legislation, WA126
 Planning Policy Statement 14, WA353
 Planning Service Recruitment, WA246
 Planning Service, WA128, WA45
 Plastic Bags, WA51–2
 Pollution Incidents in the Three Milewater
 River, WA353–4
 Publicity and Advertising Spending, WA127
 Recent Pollution in Crumlin River, WA355
 Recycling Targets, WA48
 Reduction of Councils, WA241
 Redundancies and Pension Rights, WA241
 Reform of Planning System, WA244
 Renewable Energy Developments, WA129
 Scottish Marine Bill, WA241
 Sea Pollution, WA51
 Seaweed in Ards Peninsula, WA244, WA245
 Sick Leave, WA46
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA47
 Strangford Lough, WA351
 Stress-Related Illness, WA241, WA246–7
 Traffic Accidents, WA354
 Tree Preservation Orders, WA45–6, WA46,
 WA48, WA126
 Vacant Industrial Buildings, WA44
 Voltage Power Lines, WA47
 Waste Water Treatment Works, WA127
 Wind Farm Applications, WA129
 Wind Farms, WA51
 Wind Turbines, WA129
 Work from Home, WA49

Gallagher, Mr T

Adjournment
 Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 390
 Committee Business
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 323
 Executive Committee Business
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 52–3, 53, 54, 58, 78
 Oral Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Consultation, 25
 Private Members' Business
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
 Tyrone, 287, 289–90, 295
 Sustainable Energy, 301–2
 Written Answers
 Environment
 Illegal Waste Sites, WA354
 Wind Farm Applications, WA129
 Wind Farms, WA51
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Health Service Dental Treatment, WA84
 Home-Help and Domiciliary Care Workers,
 WA368
 Respite Care Facility in Quarry Lane,

Dungannon, WA368
 Regional Development
 Street Lighting, WA157

Gardiner, Mr S

Executive Committee Business
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 Second Stage, 385–6
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 US Visit, 342
 Employment and Learning
 Sign-Language Interpreting, 345
 Environment
 Bus Safety, WA50
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Joint Ministerial Committee, WA183

Gildernew, Ms M

Adjournment
 Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 391–2
 Private Members' Business
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
 Tyrone, 292

Gildernew, Ms M (as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Ministerial Statement
 Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
 Ireland, 1–3, 4, 5, 5–6, 6, 7, 8
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
 Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
 Policy and Rural Development, 249, 250, 251,
 252
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Administration Costs, 224, 225
 Agricultural Waste Energy, WA185
 Agrienvironment Programme, WA191
 All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 223, 223–4, 224
 Animal Carcasses, WA185
 Animal Cruelty, WA9
 Animal Welfare Legislation, WA188
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Animal Welfare Legislation, WA188
 Balmoral Show, WA192–3
 Biomass Energy, WA185
 Bluetongue, 220–1, 221, WA191, WA192,
 WA292
 Business Class Flights, WA188
 Childcare in Rural Areas, WA189–90
 Coastline Protection, WA9–10
 Cod Fishing Industry, WA109
 Colony Collapse Disorder, WA288
 Communication with the Fishing Industry,
 221, 221–2, 222

Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA289–91
 Departmental Land, WA10
 Departmental Publications, WA286–7
 Departmental Websites, WA186
 Direct Fuel Subsidies, WA8
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA108
 European Fisheries Fund, WA8
 Fallen Stock Carcasses, WA192
 Farm Animals, WA109
 Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, WA11,
 WA189
 Farm on Ballyrone Road, Katesbridge, WA288
 Farmed Animals: Welfare, 222–3, 223
 Fish Stock in Irish Sea, WA186–7, WA187
 Fishery Harbours Authority, WA110
 Fishing Boats Fuel Consumption, WA186
 Flood Protection, WA9
 Focus Farm Scheme, WA110, WA184
 Forest Service Priorities, 226
 Forestry Strategy, WA191–2
 Funds surrendered in the EU Agrienvironment
 budget, WA188
 Gortin Glen Forest Park, WA108
 Icelandic and Faroese Fisheries, WA187
 Interest Paid to Livestock Owners, WA293
 Landing and Marketing Dues, WA8
 Lindsay Hall Facility at Loughry College,
 WA288–9
 Migrant Workers, WA108–9
 Movement of Circuses, WA188
 National Fallen Stock Scheme, WA288
 New Tax on Conacre Land, WA291
 Official Meetings, WA9
 Organic and Free Range Products, WA189
 Organic Food Production, WA292
 People with Disabilities, WA108
 Potato Industry, WA190–1
 Publicity and Advertising Costs, WA187
 Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme, WA288
 Rivers Agency, WA10, WA8–9
 Rural Childcare Provision, 225, 226
 Rural Communities, WA110
 Rural Development Programme, WA185
 Rural Post Offices, WA190
 Satellite Monitoring Equipment, WA7–8
 Single Farm Payment Applications, WA293
 Single Farm Payment Scheme, WA185
 Staff Absence, WA10
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA10–11
 Stress-Related Illness, WA184
 Sub Regional Community Networks, WA287,
 WA288
 Tesco Meat Range and Prices, WA292–3
 Tourism in Forest Parks, WA192
 Tuberculosis Outbreaks, WA293
 Water Levels in Clea Lakes, WA189
 Work from Home, WA109

Hamilton, Mr S

Committee Business
 Education and the Economy, 240–1
 Committee Stage
 Committee for Finance and Personnel
 Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
 11/07], CS29, CS30, CS35, CS36
 Ministerial Statement
 Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
 Ireland, 7–8
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Communication with the Fishing Industry,
 221, 222
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, 340,
 341
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Biofuels, 229
 Environment
 Road Safety: Advertisements, 32
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 European Task Force for NI, 219
 Private Members' Business
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 9–10
 Sustainable Energy, 306
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Business Class Flights, WA188
 Education
 Capital Expenditure, WA113
 Commissioners of the South Eastern and
 Education Library Board, WA301
 Employment and Learning
 Merger of Stranmillis College with Queen's
 University Belfast, WA334–5
 Environment
 Dog Fouling, WA131
 Emergency Planning Grant, WA242
 Enforcement Cases, WA43
 Illegal Dumping, WA241
 Finance and Personnel
 Equal Pay, WA248
 Ground Rents, WA131
 Inheritance Tax, WA359
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Minor Injuries Unit, WA73
 Outpatient Clinic Appointments, WA77
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Business Class Flights, WA107
 Civic Forum, WA3
 Publication Spending, WA173
 Regional Development
 Ards Borough Council Area, WA152
 Business Class Flights, WA279
 Cycle Paths, WA149

Northern Ireland Railways, WA87
Parking Tickets, WA149
Traffic Flow, WA270
Social Development
Business Class Flights, WA155
Communication with Farset, WA167

Hanna, Mrs C

Adjournment
Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South
Belfast, 114–15
Committee Business
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 332–3
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
Post Offices: Rates Relief, 38
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Stroke Strategy, 143, 144
Regional Development
Bus Lanes, 151
Private Members' Business
Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 96
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Diabetic Ketoacidosis, WA76

Hilditch, Mr D

Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 218
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Belfast Marathon, WA15
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Employee Jobs by Industry, WA230
Industry in East Antrim, WA231
Environment
Fast Food Applications, WA46
Illegal Dumping, WA128
Larne Marina, WA43
Finance and Personnel
Sick Leave, WA55
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ambulance Cover, WA74
Graduate Dentists, WA144
Voluntary and Community Groups, WA144
Regional Development
A2 Road Widening Schemes, WA378
Belfast Marathon, WA153
Bus Service, WA148
Road Schemes, WA149–50
Social Development
Common Housing Selection Scheme, WA98
Draft Social Housing Development
Programme, WA101
Housing Executive, WA160, WA166
Housing Executive Land in East Antrim, WA281
Urban Regeneration, WA101

Irwin, Mr W

Committee Business
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 328–9
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 257
Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
Ireland, 6
North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
Policy and Rural Development, 251
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, WA11,
WA189
Education
Complaints in Schools, WA217, WA318
Environment
Vacant Industrial Buildings, WA44
Regional Development
Road Maintenance Allocations, WA369
Road Side Memorials, WA155
Sewerage System, WA93

Kelly, Mr G

Matters of the Day
Spamont Car Bomb, 247

**Kelly, Mr G (as junior Minister in the Office of the
First and deputy First Minister)**

Adjournment
Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 392–4
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 200–1, 201
Final Stage, 252, 259

Kelly, Mrs D

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 122, 122–3, 123, 127–9,
130, 141, 164, 165, 166, 167, 171
Further Consideration Stage, 200, 201–2, 202
Final Stage, 253, 257, 259, 260, 263, 264, 269
Matters of the Day
Spamont Car Bomb, 248
Oral Answers
Education
South Eastern Education and Library Board,
352–3
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and
Integration, 26
Social Development
Community Development for Minority Ethnic
Groups, 155, 156

Private Members' Business

- Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 41–42
- Extended Schools Funding, 372, 378, 379

Written Answers

- Education
 - Education Workforce, WA330
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Private Sector Deal, WA36
- Environment
 - Landfill Sites, WA49–50
- Finance and Personnel
 - Distribution of Jobs, WA56
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Smoking Cessation Programmes, WA148
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, WA107
 - Disadvantaged Children, WA106
 - Good Relations District Council Plans, WA285
 - Single Equality Bill, WA1
- Regional Development
 - Bus Station, WA154

Kennedy, Mr D

Executive Committee Business

- Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 - Consideration Stage, 132, 140, 142, 162, 162–3, 163, 163–4, 164–5, 165, 171
 - Further Consideration Stage, 197, 197–8
 - Final Stage, 255, 259, 260, 263, 265, 268
- Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 - Consideration Stage, 51, 51–2, 55, 68, 72–4, 88, 89
 - Further Consideration Stage, 184, 191–2, 192

Matters of the Day

- Spamont Car Bomb, 247–8

Oral Answers

- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, 341
- Education
 - Paedophile Information Exchange, 348
- Employment and Learning
 - Skills in the Farming Community, 347
- Employment and Learning
 - University Capacity and Student Demand, 344
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Increase in Gas Prices, 229
- Environment
 - World Heritage Sites and National Parks, 30
- Finance and Personnel
 - Peace II Extension, 34
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27
- Social Development
 - Review of Public Administration, 154

Private Members' Business

- Aggregates Mapping Programme, 111
- Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 20
- Extended Schools Funding, 381
- Post-Primary Transfer, 280–1

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Bluetongue, WA192
- Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA289
- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA296
 - Modern Football Facilities, WA299
- Employment and Learning
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA333
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA342
- Environment
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA351
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA367
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Constitutional Reform Bill, WA6
 - Planning Appeals Commission Procedures, WA1–2
 - Victims' Commissioners, WA181
- Regional Development
 - Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA377
- Emerald Fund, WA156

Lo, Ms A

Adjournment

- Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast, 115–16

Oral Answers

- Environment
 - Planning Circular PC 03/07, 31
- Finance and Personnel
 - Peace II Extension, 34
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Private Practice Dentists, 147
- Social Development
 - Community Development for Minority Ethnic Groups, 156, 156–7

Written Answers

- Employment and Learning
 - Training for Success Programme, WA335
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - NI and ROI Economy, WA240
- Environment
 - Planning Service, WA128
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Dental Students, WA146
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Public Service Agreement 7, WA179
- Regional Development
 - Residents' Parking Schemes, WA157

Long, Mrs N

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage, 120–1, 125–6, 126,
126–7, 130, 132–4, 134, 136, 140, 142, 163,
170–1, 171, 174, 175

Oral Answers

Environment

Dangerous Wild Animals, 29–30

Finance and Personnel

2011 Census, 36

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

MiddleStep Services, 146

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and
Integration, 26

Written Answers

Employment and Learning

Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA334

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Pre-Enterprise Initiatives, WA238

Environment

Plastic Bags, WA51

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve,
WA105

Victims' Commissioners, WA7

Lunn, Mr T

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 235–6

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage, 167, 168, 171, 172

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Language Issues, 339

Regional Development

A5 Upgrade, 150

Private Members' Business

Extended Schools Funding, 371, 371–2, 372

Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South

Tyrone, 290–1, 291

Post-Primary Transfer, 273–4, 282–3, 283, 285,
286

Reclassification of Cannabis, 360–1, 361

Written Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Renewable Energy, WA237

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Lisanelly Site, WA148

Maginness, Mr A

Committee Business

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 327–8

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Final Stage, 258

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Final Stage, 210

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Biofuels, 230

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 217

Private Members' Business

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 18–19, 21, 22

Sustainable Energy, 310

Written Answers

Education

School Capital Building Schemes, WA327

Environment

Glass Bottles, WA50

Maginness, Mr A (as a Representative of the Assembly Commission)

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Ban on Cameras, 40, 41

Maskey, Mr A

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage, 50, 51, 53, 57, 59, 76,
77, 77–8

Further Consideration Stage, 186, 186–7

Final Stage, 207

Private Members' Business

Reclassification of Cannabis, 358, 358–9, 359

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Migrant Workers, WA108

Education

Independent Admission Exams, WA327

Employment and Learning

Migrant Workers, WA120

Employment and Learning

Education Funding, WA121

Environment

Planning Law, WA49

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Hate Crime, WA182

Social Development

Disability Living Allowance, WA97

Maskey, Mr A (as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment)

Executive Committee Business

Insolvency (Disqualification from Office:

General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 214

Maskey, Mr P

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 223

Private Members' Business

Sustainable Energy, 310–11

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ulster Canal, WA298
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
New Jobs in West Belfast and Shankill Areas,
WA237

**Maskey, Mr P (as Deputy Chairperson of the
Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment)**

Private Members' Business

Review of Business Bureaucracy, 10–11

McCallister, Mr J

Committee Business

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 322–3, 323

Oral Answers

Employment and Learning
Skills in the Farming Community, 347

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 95,
95–6, 97, 99, 100, 103
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 111, 111–12, 112
Extended Schools Funding, 368
Reclassification of Cannabis, 359

Written Answers

Education
Selection of New Committee Members, WA197
Middletown Centre for Autism, WA303
Environment
Driver Vehicle Testing Agency, WA51
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Regulation of Pharmacies, WA265
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Loughry Police Training College, WA178
Regional Development
Ballagh and Cortynan Crossings, WA88

McCann, Mr F

Committee Stage

Committee for Finance and Personnel
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS7, CS34, CS36, CS37

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 53

Ministerial Statement

Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
Ireland, 4

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sporting Excellence, 338

Social Development

Shared Future Housing, 157, 158

Private Members' Business

Reclassification of Cannabis, 357, 358

McCann, Ms J

Committee Stage

Committee for Finance and Personnel
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS37, CS47, CS48

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 134, 134–5
Further Consideration Stage, 199, 199–20
Final Stage, 253

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 227

Private Members' Business

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 22, 22–23, 44, 45
Sustainable Energy, 300–1, 301

Written Answers

Finance and Personnel
Rate Relief, WA57–8
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Speech and Language Therapists, WA147
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Gender Equality Strategy, WA2
Fuel and Food Costs, WA179

McCarthy, Mr K

Committee Business

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 331–2

Executive Committee Business

Libraries Bill
Consideration Stage, 179

Ministerial Statement

Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
Ireland, 5

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
Bluetongue, 220, 221
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Multi-Sports Stadium, 342

Education

Dundonald High School, 350

Employment and Learning

Document Accessibility for Visually Impaired
People, 348

Regional Development

Free Travel: Delay, 149

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 96–7
Reclassification of Cannabis, 361

Written Answers

Environment
Ards and Down Area Plan Inquiry, WA51

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Free Personal Care, WA146

McCartney, Mr R

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Derry City Football Club, 339–40

Education

Selection at Age 14, 353

Regional Development

Waterside Railway Station, 149

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Departmental Information in Braille, WA299

Education

Vetting Systems, WA19

Employment and Learning

All Ireland Employment, WA223

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

European Sustainable Competitiveness

Operational Programme, WA346

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Child Protection, WA263

Dentist Records, WA261–2

Physiotherapy Services, WA266

Visually Impaired, WA261

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Disability Action Proposed Relocation, WA181

Social Development

Disabled Facilities Grant, WA282

McCausland, Mr N

Executive Committee Business

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 178–9

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 226

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Binge Drinking, 145

Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 145

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 27

North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 217

Private Members' Business

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 19–20, 20

Extended Schools Funding, 373, 374

Post-Primary Transfer, 278–9

Written Answers

Education

Irish Language Officer, WA311–12

School Board of Governors, WA206

Youth Workers, WA115

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

St Patrick's Trail, WA224

McClarty, Mr D

Adjournment

Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 314

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage, 141

Oral Answers

Finance and Personnel

Stormont Events, 36

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Binge Drinking, 145

Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 144, 145

Written Answers

Education

Transferred Redundancies, WA207

Employment and Learning

PhD Projects, WA35

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Ambulance Cover, WA82

Local Commissioning Groups, WA82

Regional Development

Railway Halt in Ballykelly, WA88

McClarty, Mr D (as Deputy Speaker)

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 232

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 325, 332, 337

Executive Committee Business

Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order

(Northern Ireland) 2008, 216

Insolvency (Disqualification from Office:

General) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, 214

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage, 47, 53, 64, 67, 68, 71,

76, 88, 89, 90

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Administration Costs, 224, 225

All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 224

Communication with the Fishing Industry, 222

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Assistance to the Small-Business Sector, 227

Biofuels, 230

Changed Economic Environment, 231

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 217, 217–18

Private Members' Business

Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South

Tyrone, 287, 289, 292, 294, 296, 299

Post-Primary Transfer, 270, 272, 275, 276, 277, 281, 283, 286

McCrea, Dr W

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Bluetongue, 221

Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Community Festival Funding, WA299

McCrea, Dr W (as Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development)

Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 3–4, 4

McCrea, Mr B

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 234, 234–5, 235
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 129, 130, 131, 132, 134, 135, 137, 160, 166, 168, 168–9, 169, 170, 174
Final Stage, 257, 257–8, 258, 261, 262–3, 263, 264, 265, 268
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 58–9, 59, 59–60, 67, 70, 74, 75, 77, 89–90

Oral Answers

Education
European Language Portfolio, 349

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 97, 99, 100, 104
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 112
Extended Schools Funding, 367–8, 368, 370, 380, 381
Post-Primary Transfer, 270–2, 285, 286
Reclassification of Cannabis, 363

Written Answers

Environment
Environment and Heritage Service, WA127
Environmental Protection Agency, WA240
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Website Review, WA4
Regional Development
Northern Ireland's Railway Service, WA158

McCrea, Mr I

Executive Committee Business
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 382
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 187–8
Final Stage, 205
Private Members' Business
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 291–2
Written Answers
Regional Development
Departmental Land, WA87
Social Development
Housing Executive, WA96, WA97

Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, WA386
Winter Fuel Payments, WA387

McDonnell, Dr A

Oral Answers

Social Development
Review of Public Administration, 154

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
Departmental Publications, WA286
People with Disabilities, WA108
Publicity and Advertising Costs, WA187
Staff Absence, WA10
Stress-Related Illness, WA184
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Departmental Publications, WA295
People with Disabilities, WA111
Publicity and Advertising, WA196
Stress-Related Illness, WA112
Education
Absence Figures, WA221
Departmental Publications, WA311
Disability Employment, WA306
Schools Building Programme, WA198
Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA218
Staff Absence, WA30
Stress-Related Illness, WA120
Employment and Learning
Department Correspondence, WA122
People with Disabilities, WA121
Publicity and Advertising, WA222
Staff Absence, WA33
Stress-Related Illness, WA222
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Biofuels, WA39
Electronic Distribution of Publications, WA42
New Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen, WA230
People with Disabilities, WA42
Stress-Related Illness, WA227
Environment
Department Correspondence, WA127
People with Disabilities, WA127
Publicity and Advertising Spending, WA127
Stress-Related Illness, WA241, WA246
Finance and Personnel
Departmental Correspondence, WA133
Publicity and Advertising, WA356
Staff Absence, WA247
Stress-Related Illness, WA358
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Department Correspondence, WA144
People with Disabilities, WA142
Publicity and Advertising, WA143
Stress-Related Illness, WA362

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

People with Disabilities, WA106

Staff Absence, WA105

Stress-Related Illness, WA177

Regional Development

Departmental Publications, WA269

Disability Targets, WA278

DRD Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA93

Stress-Related Illness, WA371, WA378

Social Development

Departmental Publications, WA280

Disability Targets, WA282

Stress-Related Illness, WA383

McElduff, Mr B

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Childcare Provision, 225

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Performing Right Society, 341

Employment and Learning

Sign-Language Interpreting, 344

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 218

Social Development

Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155

Private Members' Business

Extended Schools Funding, 370, 370–1

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Gortin Glen Forest Park, WA108

Assembly Commission

Symbols and Emblems on Display in the Stormont Assembly Estate, WA389

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Amateur Drama Festivals, WA110

Education

Drumragh Integrated College, WA328

Revised Curriculum, WA32

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Dental Care, WA81

Dental Service, WA134

Discretionary Student Incentive Scheme, WA260

Health Service Dentists, WA81

Myasthenia Gravis Disease, WA360

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Partnership Body, WA3

Social Development

Co-Ownership Schemes, WA100, WA101, WA160

Council District, WA100

Fuel Allowance, WA158

McElduff, Mr B (as Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure)

Executive Committee Business

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 178, 180

McFarland, Mr A

Oral Answers

Finance and Personnel

2011 Census, 37

Private Members' Business

Sustainable Energy, 306–7

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Tourism in Forest Parks, WA192

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Breast Screening Units, WA141

Regional Development

Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works, WA87

Walking to School, WA155

Social Development

Fuel Poverty, WA170

McGill, Mrs C

Oral Answers

Employment and Learning

Education Maintenance Allowance:

Absenteeism, 347

Environment

Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 31

Private Members' Business

Reclassification of Cannabis, 363–4

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Childcare in Rural Areas, WA189

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA111

Employment and Learning

Departmental Spending, WA124

Further Education Campus, WA123

Further Education Courses, WA123, WA124

Further Education in Strabane, WA224

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourist Board Advertising, WA37

Environment

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA49

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183

Social Development

Co-Ownership Schemes, WA170

McGimpsey, Mr M

Adjournment

Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast, 113–14

McGimpsey, Mr M (as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety)**Committee Business**

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 333–5

Oral Answers**Health, Social Services and Public Safety**

Binge Drinking, 144–5, 145, 146

Clostridium Difficile, 143

MiddleStep Services, 146

Price Controls on the Sale of Alcohol, 144–5, 145, 146

Private Practice Dentists, 146–7, 147

Stroke Strategy, 144

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 102–3, 103

Written Answers**Health, Social Services and Public Safety**

Accident and Emergency Ambulances, WA363

Accident and Emergency Vehicles, WA62–4, WA67–9, WA69–71

After-School Groups, WA249–50

Agenda for Change Process, WA147

Alcohol and Drug Misuse, WA83–4

Ambulance Cover, WA74–5, WA82

Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, WA60

Arthritis, WA61

Asbestosis, WA61

At Home Nursing Care, WA264–5

Attacks on Causeway Hospital Staff, WA359

Attacks on Staff, WA134

Attempted Suicide Aftercare, WA252

Attempted Suicide Hospital Admissions, WA252–3

Bangor Hospital, WA364

Belfast Health Action Zone, WA249

Blind Registration, WA141

Breast Screening Units, WA141–2

Budget Allocation, WA72, WA72–3

Business Class Flights, WA135

Cervical Cancer Figures, WA250

Child Protection, WA263

Childcare Services, WA135–8, WA138–41

Children's Fund Projects, WA253–9

Clostridium Difficile, WA369

Closure of Hospital Wards, WA367–8, WA368

Community and Voluntary Sector, WA78–80, WA80

Community Nurses, WA142

Community Psychiatric Nurses, WA73

Consultants Vacancy, WA80

Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA367

Daisy Hill Hospital, WA59

Dementia Services, WA261

Dental Care, WA81

Dental Graduates, WA77–8, WA78

Dental Service, WA134, WA361, WA361–2, WA364–5

Dental Students, WA147

Dentist Records, WA262

Department Correspondence, WA144

Department Websites, WA260

Departmental Land, WA134, WA143

Departmental Legal Costs, WA262

DHSSPS Spend on EQIA and Consultations, WA84

Diabetes, WA61, WA142, WA266

Diabetic Ketoacidosis, WA76–7

Director of Public Health, WA81

Discretionary Student Incentive Scheme, WA260

Disinfection Mats, WA61

Domestic Violence, WA74

Drug Addiction, WA83

Drug and Alcohol Dependencies, WA84

Eating Disorder Assistance, WA262

Efficiency Targets, WA83

Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon, WA263

Epilepsy Sufferers, WA141

Family Planning Clinics, WA249

Fire and Ambulance Service, WA360

Fire and Rescue Appliances, WA143

Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles, WA360

Fire Service Appliances, WA146

Fire Stations, WA142

Flattened Head Syndrome, WA62, WA259

Forster Green Development, WA252

Fraud, WA260–1

Free Personal Care, WA144, WA146, WA264

General Practitioner Surgery, WA59

Genito-Urinary Medicine, WA144

Graduate Dentists, WA144, WA73

Health Service Dental Practices, WA265

Health Service Dental Treatment, WA84–5

Health Service Dentists, WA81, WA81–2

Health Service Neurologists, WA141

Health Service Pay Levels, WA368

Healthcare in Prisons and Middletown Centre for Autism, WA263–4

Heart Disease, WA62

High Dependency Unit, WA60, WA61

Hip Replacements, WA141, WA146

Home-Help and Domiciliary Care Workers, WA369

Hospital Plans, WA145

Hospitals: Capital Expenditure, WA251

Independent Sector, WA144

Internet Content, WA252

Lisanelly Site, WA148

Local Commissioning Groups, WA82, WA260

Magnetic Resonance Imaging, WA80

Malnutrition Statistics, WA262

Medical Secretaries, WA62

Mental Health, WA141

Mental-Health and Learning-Disability

Funding for Children, WA251–2

Mental-Health Patient Complaints, WA253

Middletown Centre for Autism, WA264
 Minor Injuries Unit, WA73
 Myasthenia Gravis Disease, WA360
 National Institute for Health and Clinical
 Excellence, WA365–6
 Newry Ambulance Station, WA85
 NHS Dental Services, WA75, WA75–6, WA76
 Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, WA267,
 WA268
 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service,
 WA251
 Number of Alcoholics, WA83
 Number of Ambulances, WA65–7
 Nurses Vacancy, WA80
 Nursing/Residential Home Residents, WA267
 Occupational Therapists, WA142
 Operation Cancellations, WA250
 Outpatient Clinic Appointments, WA77
 Parental Disciplining, WA73
 Pellet Guns, WA73–4
 People with Disabilities, WA142
 Physiotherapists Employed in Health and
 Social Care, WA250
 Physiotherapy Services, WA266
 Practising Dentists, WA359–60, WA360
 Priorities for Action 2008/09, WA367
 Public Inquiry into Mrs McGinley's Death,
 WA361
 Public Procurement Procedures, WA261
 Public Toilets in Hospitals, WA145
 Publicity and Advertising, WA143–4
 Regional Hospital, WA145
 Regulation and Quality Improvement
 Authority, WA146
 Regulation of Pharmacies, WA265
 Residential Care, WA147
 Respite Care Facility in Quarry Lane,
 Dungannon, WA368
 Review of Support Provision for Carers, WA268
 Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients, WA263
 Royal Victoria Hospital, WA60, WA61,
 WA145, WA266–7, WA267, WA268
 Rural Proofing, WA59–60
 Search and Rescue Services, WA74
 Service Framework Development, WA262
 Sexually Transmitted Diseases, WA249
 Smoke Free, WA147–8
 Smoking Cessation Programmes, WA148
 South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust,
 WA142
 South Eastern Trust Plans, WA250
 Speech and Language Therapists, WA147
 Staff Absence, WA82, WA83
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA78
 Stoma and Incontinence Appliances, WA249
 Stress-Related Illness, WA362–3
 Suicide Prevention Strategy, WA71
 Suicide Prevention, WA146

Sun Bed Regulations, WA363
 Supporting People Programme, WA71
 Teenage Pregnancies, WA134–5
 Tobacco Products, WA145
 Transfer of Legal Files, WA261
 Ulster Hospital, WA84
 Vacant Consultant Posts, WA363–4, WA364
 Visually Impaired, WA261
 Voluntary and Community Groups, WA144
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results, WA250
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: Belfast
 Trust, WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:
 Northern Trust, WA367
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results: South
 Eastern Trust, WA365
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:
 Southern Trust, WA366
 Waiting Times for Smear Test Results:
 Western Trust, WA366
 Waterside Hospital, WA265
 Wet Macular Degenerative Eye Disease, WA59
 Work from Home, WA260

McGlone, Mr P

Executive Committee Business
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 58
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Childcare Provision, 226
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Multi-Sports Stadium, 342
 Education
 Dundonald High School, 350
 Environment
 Road Safety: Advertisements, 32
 Finance and Personnel
 2011 Census, 37
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Private Practice Dentists, 146, 147
 Written Answers
 Education
 Employer Liability Cover, WA27
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Reconnect Scheme, WA347
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Civic Forum, WA5

McGlone, Mr P (as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment)

Executive Committee Business
 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
 Second Stage, 383–4

McGuinness, Mr M (as deputy First Minister)

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 255

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Older People, 24
Consultation, 24–5, 25
Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 26, 27
Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 28
Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 27, 28

Written Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Assembly Questions, WA1
Business Class Flights, WA107
Causes of Poverty, WA285
Child Poverty Strategy 2020, WA177
Children in Severe Poverty, WA173
Civic Forum, WA3, WA5, WA286
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, WA107
Constitutional Reform Bill, WA6
Department Websites, WA178
Departmental Land, WA3
Disability Action Proposed Relocation, WA181
Disadvantaged Children, WA106–7
Drumcree/Garvaghy Road, WA183
Equal Rights and Social Need Division, WA183–4
Ethnic Minorities, WA7
Extended Schools Funding, WA178
Fair Employment Laws, WA286
Family Information Group, WA2
Foreign Head of State Visits, WA174, WA175
Freedom of Information, WA1
Fuel and Food Costs, WA178–9, WA179
Funding for Children's Issues, WA178
Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence, WA176
Gender Equality Strategy, WA2–3
Good Relations District Council Plans, WA285
Good Relations Indicators, WA180
Government Advertising, WA6
Government Arrangements since Devolution, WA180
Hate Crime, WA182
Integrated Development Fund, WA177
Interface Projects and Funding, WA175
Investment Strategy 2008–2018, WA3
Joint Ministerial Committee, WA183
Loughry Police Training College, WA178
Maze/Long Kesh Site, WA181–2
Meeting Requests, WA173
Ministry of Defence Sites, WA5
Paramilitary Flags, WA107–8

Partnership Body, WA3

People with Disabilities, WA106

Planning Appeals Commission Procedures, WA2

Planning Appeals Commission, WA4, WA5–6

Post-Primary Transfer, WA105

Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183

Public Service Agreement 7, WA179–80

Publication Spending, WA174

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve, WA105

Sectarianism, WA4

Sexual Orientation Issues, WA173

Single Equality Bill, WA1, WA7

Social Inequality, WA176

Staff Absence, WA105–6

Stress-Related Illness, WA177

Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA181

Sustainable Development Forum, WA286

Sustainable Development Strategy, WA176

Telephone Calls, WA173

Victims and Survivors, WA105

Victims' Commissioners, WA1, WA7, WA181

Website Review, WA4–5

Work from Home, WA106

McIlveen, Miss M

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 238–9

Private Members' Business

Extended Schools Funding, 372–3

Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 292–3

Post-Primary Transfer, 275–6

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Single Farm Payment Scheme, WA185

Education

Assembly Questions, WA117

Educational Psychologists, WA24

Free School Meals, WA318

Funded Nursery School Places, WA316

Head Teachers, WA113

Home Schooling, WA309, WA310

ICT Management Services, WA25

Integrated Status, WA26

Irish-Medium Schools, WA117, WA200

Language Translation, WA117, WA119

Northgate, WA25

Nursery School Places in Carryduff, WA315, WA316

Nursery School Places in Comber, WA313

Nursery School Places in Dundonald, WA316

Nursery School Places in Killyleagh, WA315, WA316

Nursery School Places in Saintfield, WA312

Transferors Representative Council, WA26

Vacancy Control Policy, WA23

Welfare Officers, WA23
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA180–1
Social Development
Bonfire Funding, WA168
Housing Executive, WA168
Warm Homes Scheme, WA168

McKay, Mr D

Executive Committee Business
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 385
Matters of the Day
Death of Robert Dunlop, 317
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Forest Service Priorities, 226
Private Members' Business
Sustainable Energy, 305–6
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Business Class Flights, WA13
Education
GCSE Irish History, WA312
Rural Proofing, WA26
Employment and Learning
English as a Foreign Language Courses, WA332
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Business Class Flights, WA336
Environment
Business Class Flights, WA126
Driving License Applications, WA241
Finance and Personnel
Business Class Flights, WA133, WA135
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Rural Proofing, WA59
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Good Relations Indicators, WA180
Regional Development
Glenariff Road, WA88
Social Development
Business Class Flights, WA159–60
Rural Proofing, WA97

McLaughlin, Mr M

Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Clostridium Difficile, 143
Private Members' Business
Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 42
Review of Business Bureaucracy, 13
Written Answers
Environment
Planning Applications, WA50

Finance and Personnel
Cross-Border Mobility, WA57
Social Development
Housing Executive, WA168

McLaughlin, Mr M (as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel)

Committee Business
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill
Extension of Committee Stage, 8–9
Committee Stage
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill
[NIA 11/07], CS1, CS3, CS4, CS6, CS7, CS8, CS9, CS11, CS12, CS15, CS16, CS17, CS19, CS20, CS23, CS24, CS27, CS28, CS29, CS30, CS31, CS32, CS33, CS34, CS36, CS37, CS38, CS38–9, CS41, CS42, CS43, CS44, CS45, CS47, CS48, CS49, CS50, CS51
Executive Committee Business
Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order
(Northern Ireland) 2008, 215–16

McNarry, Mr D

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 198, 199, 201
Final Stage, 258, 259, 263, 268
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 192
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Farmed Animals: Welfare, 222, 223
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Multi-Sports Stadium, 341
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 219
Private Members' Business
Carer's Allowance Bill
Second Stage, 193
Post-Primary Transfer, 286
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Maze Stadium, WA298
Maze Stadium Site, WA14
Ulster Museum, WA111
Education
South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA19
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
After-School Groups, WA249
Review of Support Provision for Carers, WA268
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Foreign Head of State Visits, WA174, WA174–5
Government Advertising, WA6

Regional Development
Disused Culverts, WA148
Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme, WA158
Water Meters, WA93
Social Development
National Carers' Strategy, WA283

McQuillan, Mr A

Adjournment
Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 313
Committee Stage
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS7
Oral Answers
Social Development
Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155
Written Answers
Environment
Planning Policy Statement 14, WA353
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Attacks on Causeway Hospital Staff, WA359
Disinfection Mats, WA61
Practising Dentists, WA359, WA360
Royal Victoria Hospital, WA61
Regional Development
Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services, WA95
Plant Equipment, WA87
Townland Names, WA371
Water Rates, WA154

Molloy, Mr F

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 122, 130, 130–1
Consideration Stage, 166, 166–7, 168
Further Consideration Stage, 197, 200, 202
Final Stage, 254, 254–5, 259
Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 6
North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 251
Oral Answers
Environment
Local Limits on Bird-Showing Licences, 33, 34
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Victims' Commissioners: Workplan, 28
Private Members' Business
Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 42–3, 43
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Agrienvironment Programme, WA191

Employment and Learning
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA335
Social Development
Renewable Energy, WA283

Molloy, Mr F (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
Public Car Parking Spaces in Enniskillen, 390
Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South Belfast, 112
Waste Management in East Derry/Londonderry, 312
Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 232, 233, 234, 235, 246
Executive Committee Business
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 382
Oral Answers
Regional Development
A5 Upgrade, 151
Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 148
Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 153
Social Development
Shared Future Housing, 158
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 105
Extended Schools Funding, 378, 379, 381
Sustainable Energy, 300

Morrow, Lord

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 264
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 64
Matters of the Day
Spamont Car Bomb, 248
Ministerial Statement
North/South Ministerial Council — Animal Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, 252
Private Members' Business
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 287, 288, 295, 296
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Organic and Free Range Products, WA189
Education
Primary and Post-Primary School Figures, WA301
School Transport, WA27
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Tourist Board, WA39
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Emergency Ambulances in Dungannon, WA263

Regional Development
Equality Legislation, WA272
Unlawful Signage, WA369
Social Development
Eastvale Avenue Housing Estate, WA96

Morrow, Lord (as Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures)

Committee Business
Standing Orders, 90–2

Moutray, Mr S

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 165, 165–6, 166
Written Answers
Education
Dickson Plan for Education, WA307, WA307–8
Environment
Planning Applications, WA50
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health Service Dental Practices, WA265
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Civic Forum, WA5
Regional Development
Road Works Projects, WA275
Traffic Calming Measures, WA275
Traffic Congestion in Waringstown, WA276
Vandalism to Railway and Bus Stations, WA276
Social Development
Housing Associations, WA163
Housing Executive, WA162, WA163
Housing Waiting Lists, WA164
Regional Infrastructure Programme, WA167
Renewing Communities Fund, WA282
Staff Sickness, WA169

Moutray, Mr S (as a Representative of the Assembly Commission)

Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Funding for Constituency Offices, 39

Murphy, Mr C (as Minister for Regional Development)

Oral Answers
Regional Development
A5 Upgrade, 150, 151
Bus Lanes, 151, 151–2
Dungiven to Drumahoe Dual Carriageway, 147–8, 148
Free Travel: Delay, 149, 149–50
Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 152, 153
Waterside Railway Station, 149
Written Answers
Regional Development
A2 Road Widening Schemes, WA378–9

A3 Road from Portadown, WA156
A4 Road Works, WA92
Airport Car Parking, WA269
Ambulance Travel, WA90
Ards Borough Council Area, WA152–3
Ballagh and Cortynan Crossings, WA88
Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry Service, WA373
Ballymoney Railway Station, WA158
Belfast Marathon, WA153
Blue Badges for the Disabled, WA379
Bus Service, WA148
Bus Station, WA154
Business Class Flights, WA279
Car Clubs, WA93
Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA377
Cycle Paths, WA149
Department Websites, WA270
Departmental Land, WA88, WA89–90, WA149
Departmental Publications, WA269
Departmental Spending, WA89
Disability Targets, WA278
Disabled Parking, WA151, WA156, WA274, WA278
Disused Culverts, WA148
DRD Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA93
Emerald Fund, WA157
Enterprise Rail Link, WA92
Equality Legislation, WA272
EU Funding, WA274
Executive Office in Brussels, WA157
Foyle Connect Project, WA268
Frances Street, Newtownards, WA88
Free Travel Over 60s, WA278–9
Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme, WA158
Glenariff Road, WA88
Hydrogen Technology for Buses, WA277
Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services, WA94, WA95
Independent Water Review Panel, WA94
Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works, WA87
Land Abandonment, WA91
Meeting Times, WA153
Millennium Way Phase 2, WA156
Newcastle to Hilltown Road, WA88
North Down Borough Council Area, WA153–4
Northern Ireland Railways, WA87, WA154
Northern Ireland Water, WA151–2
Northern Ireland's Railway Service, WA158
Parking in Belfast, WA270–1, WA271, WA271–2
Parking Schemes, WA155
Parking Tickets, WA86–7, WA149, WA274
Passing Bays on the Carrowclare Road, WA371
People with Disabilities, WA150
Plant Equipment, WA87
Public Road Maintenance, WA269
Rail Accidents, WA268

Rail Services, WA277, WA279
 Railway Halt in Ballykelly, WA89
 Residents' Parking Schemes, WA157
 Road Accidents, WA86
 Road and Water Plans in Crumlin, WA273
 Road and Water Plans in Mallusk, WA274
 Road and Water Plans in Randalstown, WA273
 Road Bridges, WA85–6, WA86
 Road Maintenance Allocations, WA369
 Road Safety, WA86
 Road Safety Issues, WA279
 Road Safety Measures in Donaghadee, WA378
 Road Safety Measures in Millisle, WA377–8
 Road Schemes, WA150
 Road Side Memorials, WA155
 Road Works Projects, WA275–6
 Roads Service Safer Roads, WA90
 Rock Excavation, WA279–80
 Rural Transport Fund, WA157
 Sale of Land, WA91
 Senior SmartPass Holders, WA90, WA90–1
 Sewerage System, WA94
 Sewerage Works, WA156
 Signage for Drivers in Fountain Hill, Derry/
 Londonderry, WA376
 SmartPass Fares, WA279
 Speed Limits, WA269–70
 Springhill Shopping Centre, WA91–2, WA92
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA91
 Street Lighting, WA157
 Stress-Related Illness, WA371–3, WA378
 Tarmacking of Roads, WA272, WA272–3
 Thompson Solutions, WA151
 Ticketing System, WA150
 Toome Bypass, WA93
 Townland Names, WA371
 Traffic Calming Measures, WA275, WA375–6
 Traffic Calming Measures at Movilla Road,
 Newtownards, WA93
 Traffic Calming Measures in North Down,
 WA370
 Traffic Congestion in Waringstown, WA276
 Traffic Flow, WA270
 Translink Buses, WA370
 Ulsterbus Goldline Express, WA94
 Ulsterbus, WA376
 Unlawful Signage, WA369
 Vandalism to Railway and Bus Stations, WA276
 Walking to School, WA155
 Water and Roads Service, WA277, WA278,
 WA373–5
 Water Meters, WA376, WA93
 Water Preservation, WA154
 Water Pressure, WA157
 Water Rates, WA154
 Water Supply, WA153
 Work from Home, WA149

Neeson, Mr S

Executive Committee Business
 Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 Consideration Stage, 57–8, 62
 Matters of the Day
 Death of Robert Dunlop, 318
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Varney II Report, WA56
 Regional Development
 Executive Office in Brussels, WA157

Neeson, Mr S (as a Representative of the Assembly Commission)

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Bottled Water, 40

Newton, Mr R

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Sporting Excellence, 338
 Finance and Personnel
 Stormont Events, 36
 Private Members' Business
 Review of Business Bureaucracy, 16–18
 Written Answers
 Education
 Post-Primary Education Research Costs, WA311
 Employment and Learning
 Further Education Colleges, WA35
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Business Units, WA125

Ní Chuilín, Ms C

Committee Business
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 321–2
 Oral Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Private Practice Dentists, 147
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 216, 217
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Communities, WA109
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Departmental Funding, WA11–13
 Midnight Soccer, WA11
 Education
 Dyslexia Support, WA114
 Education Welfare Officers, WA200
 Pupils with Special Educational Needs, WA303
 Youth Workers, WA29
 Employment and Learning
 Departmental Land, WA122
 Departmental Legal Costs, WA222
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Belfast Health Action Zone, WA249
 Dental Service, WA361
 Departmental Land, WA143
 Departmental Legal Costs, WA262
 Diabetes, WA142
 Drug and Alcohol Dependencies, WA84
 Eating Disorder Assistance, WA262
 Forster Green Development, WA252
 Occupational Therapists, WA142
 Public Inquiry into Mrs McGinley's Death, WA360–1
 Regional Hospital, WA145
 Suicide Prevention Strategy, WA71
 Supporting People Programme, WA71
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Integrated Development Fund, WA177
 Interface Projects and Funding, WA175
 Regional Development
 Departmental Land, WA149
 Social Development
 Co-Ownership Schemes, WA102
 Departmental Land, WA162, WA380
 Departmental Legal Costs, WA280
 Housing Executive, WA379
 Housing Waiting Lists, WA379
 Ligoniel Improvement Association, WA103
 Northern Ireland Housing Executive, WA102
 Renewing Communities Fund, WA102
 Supported Housing Schemes, WA95–6
 Supported Living Schemes, WA95

O'Dowd, Mr J

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Ban on Cameras, 40
 Private Members' Business
 Extended Schools Funding, 378, 378–9, 379, 380, 381
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 294, 294–5, 295
 Post-Primary Transfer, 284, 284–5
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 2012 Olympic Games, WA295
 Horse Sport Ireland, WA296
 Education
 St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's College in Banbridge, WA312
 Environment
 Dual Mandates, WA126
 Finance and Personnel
 New Computers, WA132–3
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, WA146

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183
 Regional Development
 Millennium Way Phase 2, WA156

O'Loan, Mr D

Committee Stage
 Committee for Finance and Personnel
 Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS4, CS5, CS20, CS22, CS33, CS34, CS35, CS37
 Matters of the Day
 Death of Robert Dunlop, 318
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Funding for Constituency Offices, 38–9, 39
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Performing Right Society, 341
 Employment and Learning
 Sign-Language Interpreting, 344
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Changed Economic Environment, 230
 Finance and Personnel
 Rates Relief for over 70s, 38
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Clostridium Difficile, 143
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 28
 Regional Development
 Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 153
 Private Members' Business
 Reclassification of Cannabis, 359–60
 Written Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Training for Success Programme, WA336
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Telephone Calls, WA173
 Regional Development
 Ballymoney Railway Station, WA158

O'Neill, Mrs M

Committee Business
 Education and the Economy, 237–8
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Childcare Provision, 225
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 MiddleStep Services, 146
 Private Members' Business
 Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 93–4
 Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 288–9, 289
 Post-Primary Transfer, 272

Written Answers

Education

Extended Schools Programme, WA328

Employment and Learning

Careers Advice Service, WA33

Pathways to Work Programme, WA335

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Regional Tourism Partnerships, WA239

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Equal Rights and Social Need Division, WA183

Regional Development

Water Pressure, WA157

O'Neill, Mrs M (as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)

Committee Business

Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 335–7, 337

Paisley Jnr, Mr I

Matters of the Day

Death of Robert Dunlop, 317

Paisley, Rev Dr Ian

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage, 88

Paisley, Rev Dr Ian (as First Minister)

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

European Task Force for NI, 219, 219–20

North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 216–17, 217

Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC, 218

OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 219

Written Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Assembly Questions, WA1

Business Class Flights, WA107

Causes of Poverty, WA285

Child Poverty Strategy 2020, WA177

Children in Severe Poverty, WA173

Civic Forum, WA3, WA5, WA286

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, WA107

Constitutional Reform Bill, WA6

Department Websites, WA178

Departmental Land, WA3

Departmental Publications, WA286

Disability Action Proposed Relocation, WA181

Disadvantaged Children, WA106–7

Drumcree/Garvaghy Road, WA183

Equal Rights and Social Need Division, WA183–4

Ethnic Minorities, WA7

Extended Schools Funding, WA178

Fair Employment Laws, WA286

Family Information Group, WA2

Foreign Head of State Visits, WA174, WA175

Freedom of Information, WA1

Fuel and Food Costs, WA178–9, WA179

Funding for Children's Issues, WA178

Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence, WA176

Gender Equality Strategy, WA2–3

Good Relations District Council Plans, WA285

Good Relations Indicators, WA180

Government Advertising, WA6

Government Arrangements since

Devolution, WA180

Hate Crime, WA182

Integrated Development Fund, WA177

Interface Projects and Funding, WA175

Investment Strategy 2008–2018, WA3

Joint Ministerial Committee, WA183

Loughry Police Training College, WA178

Maze/Long Kesh Site, WA181–2

Meeting Requests, WA173

Ministry of Defence Sites, WA5

Paramilitary Flags, WA107–8

Partnership Body, WA3

People with Disabilities, WA106

Planning Appeals Commission Procedures, WA2

Planning Appeals Commission, WA4, WA5–6

Post-Primary Transfer, WA105

Poverty in Northern Ireland, WA183

Public Service Agreement 7, WA179–80

Publication Spending, WA174

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part Time Reserve, WA105

Sectarianism, WA4

Sexual Orientation Issues, WA173

Single Equality Bill, WA1, WA7

Social Inequality, WA176

Staff Absence, WA105–6

Stress-Related Illness, WA177

Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA181

Sustainable Development Forum, WA286

Sustainable Development Strategy, WA176

Telephone Calls, WA173

Victims and Survivors, WA105

Victims' Commissioners, WA1, WA7, WA181

Website Review, WA4–5

Work from Home, WA106

Poots, Mr E

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Consideration Stage, 137, 138

Poots, Mr E (as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)

Executive Committee Business

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 177, 177–8, 179, 179–80, 181, 181–2, 182, 183

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

2010 Quarter-centenary of the Plantation of Ulster, 343

Derry City Football Club, 339, 340

Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, 340–1, 341

Language Issues, 339

Multi-Sports Stadium, 341–2, 342

Performing Right Society, 341

Sporting Excellence, 338, 338–9

Support Structure for Museums, 340

US Visit, 342

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympic Games, WA295–6

After-School Sports Activities, WA13–14

Amateur Drama Festivals, WA110–11

Armagh Observatory, WA13

Arts Council Funding, WA297, WA298

Awards for All Funding, WA14–15

Belfast Marathon, WA15

Business Class Flights, WA13

Castle Gardens Primary School, WA298

Commonwealth Games, WA112

Community Festival Funding, WA299

Contracts for Consultancy Services, WA296–7

Danny Blanchflower Complex, WA110

Department Websites, WA112

Departmental Funding, WA11–13

Departmental Information in Braille, WA299–300

Departmental Publications, WA295

Equality Impact Assessments, WA111

EU Funding, WA295

Funding for School Sports Finals, WA298

Girona Collection, WA299

Horse Sport Ireland, WA296

International Practical Shooting Sports, WA14

Irish Communication, WA111–12

Irish Language, WA112, WA193

Irish Language and Ulster-Scots, WA299

Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA193

Irish Language Groups, WA299

Maze Stadium, WA113, WA298

Maze Stadium Site, WA14

Midnight Soccer, WA11

Modern Football Facilities, WA299

Museums Council, WA196

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, WA111

New Library in Newtownards, WA298

Olympic Events, WA113

People with Disabilities, WA111

Pigeon Racing, WA300

Private Finance Initiative Library, WA295

Publicity and Advertising, WA196

Rebuilt Library in Bangor, WA297

Re-Imaging Communities Programme, WA194–6

Sale of Department Land, WA193

Sport NI, WA14

Stress-Related Illness, WA112

Support for Irish Language and GAA Organisations, WA193

Translating Correspondence, WA11

Trip to Texas, WA11

Ulster Canal, WA298

Ulster Museum, WA111

Ulster-Scots Cultural Office, WA13

Ulster-Scots Cultural Tourism, WA13

Work from Home, WA14

Purvis, Ms D

Committee Stage

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS7, CS8

Matters of the Day

Death of Robert Dunlop, 318

Private Members' Business

Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 43

Written Answers

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients, WA263

Social Development

Connswater Housing, WA281

Ramsey, Mr P

Executive Committee Business

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 182–3

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Derry City Football Club, 339

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 219

Regional Development

A5 Upgrade, 151

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Potato Industry, WA190

Employment and Learning

Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine, WA333

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Industries, WA124

Bioscience and Pharmaceutical Sectors, WA234, WA342

Biotechnology Science Park in Coleraine,
WA341–2
Invest NI, WA42
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Diabetes, WA266
Regional Development
Hydrogen Technology for Buses, WA276
Rail Services, WA277
Speed Limits, WA269
Social Development
Gambling Regulations, WA170
Fuel Prices, WA381

Ramsey, Ms S

Committee Business
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 323,
325–6, 337
Private Members' Business
Access to Health Service Dental Treatment,
103–4, 104, 104–5
Reclassification of Cannabis, 358, 362, 366
Written Answers
Education
Irish Language Schools, WA308
Employment and Learning
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA334
Environment
Off-Sales, WA45
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Children's Fund Projects, WA253
Community and Voluntary Sector, WA78, WA80
Efficiency Targets, WA83
Social Development
Conor Rise and Conor House, WA280
DSD Funding for Counselling Services, WA99,
WA99–100
Liquor Licensing Laws, WA101
Official Meetings, WA101
Underage and Public Drinking, WA101
Youth Workers, WA98

**Ramsey, Ms S (as Chairperson of the Committee
for Employment and Learning)**

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 232–4, 234, 235

Ritchie, Ms M (as Minister for Social Development)

Adjournment
Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South
Belfast, 116–17
Executive Committee Business
Mesothelioma, etc., Bill
First Stage, 355
Oral Answers
Social Development
Community Development for Minority Ethnic
Groups, 156, 156–7
Public Housing Stock, 153, 153–4

Reducing Benefit Claimants, 155
Review of Public Administration, 154, 155
Shared Future Housing, 157, 158
Written Answers
Social Development
Alley Gating, WA383, WA383–4, WA384
Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme, WA97
Areas at Risk Programme, WA104
Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee, WA384
Benefit Take-Up, WA169
Bonfire Funding, WA168
Business Class Flights, WA155, WA160
Common Housing Selection Scheme, WA98
Communication with Farset, WA167
Community Support Programme, WA383
Connswater Housing, WA281
Conor Rise and Conor House, WA280
Co-Ownership Housing Association, WA379,
WA384, WA385, WA387
Co-Ownership Schemes, WA100, WA101,
WA102, WA160, WA162, WA170
Council District, WA100
Departmental Land, WA160, WA162,
WA380–1, WA381–3
Departmental Legal Costs, WA280–1
Departmental Publications, WA280
Departmental Websites, WA281
Disability Living Allowance, WA97, WA159,
WA160
Disability Targets, WA282
Disabled Access in Victoria Square, WA379
Disabled Facilities Grant, WA282
Draft Social Housing Development
Programme, WA101
DSD Funding for Counselling Services,
WA99, WA99–100
DSD Spend on EQIA and Consultations,
WA101–2
Eastvale Avenue Housing Estate, WA96
Energy Performance Certificates, WA97
Environmental Improvement Schemes,
WA167–8
EU Funding, WA168
Festival Funding, WA161–2
Fuel Allowance, WA158
Fuel Poverty, WA170
Fuel Prices, WA381
Gambling Regulations, WA170–1
Green Spaces, WA167
Heating Replacement Programme, WA103
Heating Systems, WA167
Homeless People, WA169
Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in
Limavady, WA384
Hostel Accommodation in Newtownards,
WA384
Housing Associations, WA163, WA165

Housing Executive, WA96–7, WA97, WA98, WA160, WA162–3, WA163, WA163–4, WA165, WA165–6, WA166, WA168, WA379

Housing Executive Expenditure, WA102

Housing Executive Land in East Antrim, WA281–2

Housing Executive Tenants, WA384

Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget, WA386

Housing Priorities, WA170

Housing Selection Scheme, WA169

Housing Waiting Lists, WA164, WA379–80

Incapacity Benefit, WA100

Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, WA386–7

Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane, WA387–8, WA388

Legislation to Protect Caravan Owners, WA388

Ligoniel Improvement Association, WA103

Liquor Licensing Laws, WA101

Local Community Fund, WA385

Modernisation Fund, WA159, WA283

Modernisation Fund Capital Programme, WA162

National Carers' Strategy, WA283

NI Housing Executive, WA280

Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association, WA103

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, WA102

Official Meetings, WA101

Off-Road Bikes, WA103

Redevelopment of the Strabane Jobs and Benefits Agency, WA389

Regional Infrastructure Programme, WA167

Renewable Energy, WA283

Renewing Communities Fund, WA102–3, WA282

Replacement Grants, WA385–6

Rural Proofing, WA97

Social Housing, WA161

Social Housing Accommodation, WA161

Social Security Agency, WA103

Staff Sickness, WA169

Stress-Related Illness, WA383

Supported Housing Schemes, WA95

Supported Living Schemes, WA95

Town Centres, WA169–70

Travellers' Sites, WA164

Underage and Public Drinking, WA101

Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA171

Urban Regeneration, WA101, WA165

Warm Homes Scheme, WA168

Water Charges, WA168

Winter Fuel Payments, WA387

Wood Pellet Boilers, WA167

Work from Home, WA167

Youth Workers, WA159, WA98

Robinson, Mr G

Oral Answers

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Clostridium Difficile, 143

Regional Development

Waterside Railway Station, 149

Private Members' Business

Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 100–1

Reclassification of Cannabis, 361–2

Sustainable Energy, 305

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

National Fallen Stock Scheme, WA288

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

2012 Olympic Games, WA341

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

High Dependency Unit, WA60, WA60–1

Public Toilets in Hospitals, WA145

Royal Victoria Hospital, WA60, WA145, WA266, WA267, WA268

Regional Development

Enterprise Rail Link, WA92

Northern Ireland Railways, WA154

Passing Bays on the Carrowclare Road, WA370

Rail Accidents, WA268

SmartPass Fares, WA279

Translink Buses, WA370

Social Development

Alley Gating, WA383, WA384

Hospital Lane Improvement Scheme in Limavady, WA384

Robinson, Mr K

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 239–40

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage, 81, 81–2, 82

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Childcare Provision, 226

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Action Renewables Programme, 228

Finance and Personnel

Rates Relief for over 70s, 37

Regional Development

Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 152–3

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Funding for School Sports Finals, WA298

Education

Interactive Whiteboards, WA199

Nursery School Places, WA314

Pupil Profiles in Primary Schools, WA315

Recycling, WA20

Recycling in Schools, WA198

Renewable Energy Resources, WA20, WA23
Voltage Power Lines, WA200
Employment and Learning
English as a Foreign Language Courses, WA332
Environment
Northern Ireland Water, WA46
Planning Approvals, WA43
Pollution Incidents in the Three Milewater
River, WA353
Voltage Power Lines, WA47
Finance and Personnel
Overhead Power Lines, WA55
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health Service Pay Levels, WA368
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Freedom of Information, WA1
Fair Employment Laws, WA286
Regional Development
Roads Service Safer Roads, WA90

Robinson, Mr P

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 124, 126
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Final Stage, 207, 208

**Robinson, Mr P (as Minister of Finance and
Personnel)**

Executive Committee Business
Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order
(Northern Ireland) 2008, 215, 216
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
2011 Census, 36, 36–7, 37
Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35, 35–6
Peace II Extension, 34, 34–5
Post Offices: Rates Relief, 38
Rates Relief for over 70s, 37, 38
Stormont Events, 36
Written Answers
Finance and Personnel
Advice Centre, WA55
Broken and Stolen Electrical Equipment, WA356
Budget Spending Plans, WA58
Business Class Flights, WA133
Civil Servants Seeking Transfer, WA356–7
Civil Service Commuter Statistics, WA247
Claims of Discrimination, WA52–3
Composition of Civil Service Staff, WA357–8
Cross-Border Mobility, WA57
Department Websites, WA247
Departmental Correspondence, WA134
Departmental Funding, WA58
Departmental Land, WA133
Distribution of Jobs, WA56
Equal Pay, WA248

Equality Impact Assessments, WA132
Executive's Review of Rating, WA56
Expenditure on Consultants, WA133
Financial Services Industry, WA55–6
Ground Rents, WA131
Industrial De-rating, WA54
Inheritance Tax, WA359
Interreg IV Funding, WA58
Land Disposals, WA55
Local Produce, WA58
Ministerial Directions, WA58
New Computers, WA133
Non-Domestic Ratepayers, WA53–4, WA54–5
Overhead Power Lines, WA55
Peace III Expenditure, WA57
Peace III Programme, WA248
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit,
WA57
Publicity and Advertising, WA356
Rate Relief, WA57–8
Rates Debt, WA57
Renewable Energy, WA248
Sick Leave, WA55
Staff Absence, WA247–8
Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA356
Staff Working from Home, WA55
Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin
Hospital, WA357
Stress-Related Illness, WA358–9
Unpaid Rates, WA131–2
Varney II Report, WA56

Robinson, Mrs I

Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 131
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 89
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Direct Fuel Subsidies, WA8
European Fisheries Fund, WA8
Fish Stock in Irish Sea, WA186, WA187
Fishery Harbours Authority, WA110
Fishing Boats Fuel Consumption, WA186
Icelandic and Faroese Fisheries, WA187
Landing and Marketing Dues, WA8
Satellite Monitoring Equipment, WA7
Culture, Arts and Leisure
New Library in Newtownards, WA298
Education
Castle Gardens Primary School, WA206
Finance and Personnel
Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths in Altnagelvin
Hospital, WA357
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Services, WA261
Staff Absence, WA82, WA83

Social Development
Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing
Association, WA103
Co-Ownership Schemes, WA162
Co-Ownership Housing Association, WA384,
WA385, WA387

**Robinson, Mrs I (as Chairperson of the Committee
for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)**

Committee Business
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 319–21, 321
Private Members' Business
Access to Health Service Dental Treatment,
94–5, 95

Ross, Mr A

Assembly Business, 1
Executive Committee Business
Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 384–5, 385
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 50, 56, 63, 80–1, 87
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 185–6, 186
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Ban on Cameras, 40
Employment and Learning
Stranmillis University College: Merger, 346
Environment
Dangerous Wild Animals, 29
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Mapping Programme, 106–7
Post-Primary Transfer, 279–80, 283
Reclassification of Cannabis, 356–7, 357, 365–6,
366
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Official Meetings, WA9
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Commonwealth Games, WA112
Education
Class Sizes, WA16
Numeracy and Literacy Skills, WA203
Review of Teacher Education, WA115
Teachers, WA300
Teaching Jobs, WA303
Employment and Learning
Skills Base, WA33
Stranmillis University College, WA122, WA123
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Economically Inactive, WA40
Single Electricity Market, WA225
Sports and Tourism, WA238
Unemployment Rates, WA41
Village Tourism, WA37–8
Finance and Personnel
Executive's Review of Rating, WA56

Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Alcohol and Drug Misuse, WA83
Dental Graduates, WA77, WA78
Drug Addiction, WA83
Number of Alcoholics, WA83
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Meeting Requests, WA173
Social Development
Disability Living Allowance, WA159, WA160

Ruane, Ms C (as Minister of Education)

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 242–5
Oral Answers
Education
Dundonald High School, 350, 351
European Language Portfolio, 349, 349–50, 350
Paedophile Information Exchange, 348, 249
School Crossing, 351, 352
Selection at Age 14, 353
South Eastern Education and Library Board,
352, 253
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 375–6, 376, 377,
377–8, 378
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
Tyrone, 296–7
Post-Primary Transfer, 281–2
Written Answers
Education
Absence Figures, WA221
After-School Clubs, WA203
Assembly Questions, WA17, WA117
Balmoral High School, WA219–20, WA302
Behavioural Problems in Schools, WA331
Capital Building Programme, WA16
Capital Expenditure, WA113
Castle Gardens Primary School, WA206
Children and Young People's Funding
Package, WA201–2
Children Statemented, WA19, WA29–30
Children with English as an Additional
Language, WA220
Class Sizes, WA16
Commissioners of the South Eastern and
Education Library Board, WA301
Community Relations Core Funding Scheme,
WA196–7
Complaints in Schools, WA217, WA318
Conlig Primary School, WA16
Creative Youth Partnerships, WA326–7
Department Websites, WA207
Departmental Land, WA199
Departmental Publications, WA311
Dickson Plan for Education, WA307, WA308
Disability Employment, WA306
Donaghadee High School, WA18, WA119–20,

WA120, WA205, WA206, WA206–7,
 WA302, WA311
 Donemana Primary School, WA318
 Down High School in Downpatrick, WA313
 Drumragh Integrated College, WA328
 Dyslexia Support, WA114
 Education Sector Employees, WA307
 Education Targets, WA205
 Education Village, WA28
 Education Welfare Officers, WA200-1
 Education Workforce, WA330–1
 Educational Psychologists, WA24
 Educational Welfare Officers, WA24
 Employer Liability Cover, WA27
 Equality Impact Assessments, WA116
 Extended Schools Programme, WA300,
 WA328–30
 Falling Pupil Numbers, WA330
 Fire Prevention, WA113–14
 Free School Meals, WA318–26
 Funded Nursery School Places, WA316
 GCSE Irish History, WA312
 Glastry School, WA25
 Grammar School Entrance Exams, WA207,
 WA316–17, WA317
 Grammar Schools, WA317
 Head Teachers, WA113
 Home Schooling, WA309–10, WA310,
 WA310–11
 ICT Management Services, WA25
 Implementation of Inclusion Agenda,
 WA209–10
 Independent Admission Exams, WA327,
 WA328, WA330
 Integrated Status, WA26
 Interactive Whiteboards, WA199–200,
 WA208, WA208–9
 Irish Books, WA24
 Irish Language, WA18
 Irish Language Officer, WA204
 Irish Language Schools, WA308
 Irish-Medium Schools, WA17, WA117–19,
 WA200
 Killard Special School, WA119
 Kindle Integrated Primary School, WA210–
 11, WA211–12, WA212–13, WA217
 Language Translation, WA117, WA119
 Middletown Centre for Autism, WA218,
 WA218–19, WA219, WA303, WA308,
 WA308–9
 Millisle Primary School, WA198
 Minor Works Capital Scheme, WA219
 Mobile Classrooms, WA197, WA301
 Movilla High School, WA26
 Northgate, WA25
 Numeracy and Literacy Skills, WA203–4
 Nursery Provision, WA27–8
 Nursery School Places, WA314–15

Nursery School Places in Bangor, WA318
 Nursery School Places in Carryduff, WA315,
 WA316
 Nursery School Places in Comber, WA313
 Nursery School Places in Donaghadee and
 Millisle, WA318
 Nursery School Places in Dundonald, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Holywood, WA317
 Nursery School Places in Killyleagh, WA316
 Nursery School Places in Saintfield, WA312,
 WA312–13
 Parkhall College, WA20, WA26
 Post-Primary Pupil Figures, WA220, WA220–1
 Post-Primary Education Research Costs, WA311
 Primary and Post-Primary School Absences,
 WA313–14, WA314
 Primary and Post-Primary School Figures,
 WA301–2, WA331
 Primary School Figures, WA221, WA332
 Primary School Funding, WA327–8
 Primary School Pupil Figures, WA214–15
 Pupil Profiles in Primary Schools, WA315
 Pupils with Special Educational Needs,
 WA303–6, WA307
 Recycling, WA20
 Recycling in Schools, WA198
 Renewable Energy Resources, WA21–3, WA23
 Review of Teacher Education, WA115–16
 Revised Curriculum, WA32
 Rural Proofing, WA26
 School Board of Governors, WA206
 School Capital Building Schemes, WA327
 School Crossing Patrol Officers, WA17–18
 School Curriculum, WA207–8
 School Principal Appointments, WA204
 School Transport, WA16, WA20, WA27
 School Uniforms, WA203
 Schools Building Programme, WA198
 Secondary School Pupil Figures, WA214,
 WA215, WA216, WA216–17
 Secondary Schools, WA317
 Selection of New Committee Members, WA197
 Sex Education, WA18
 Social Mobility, WA15
 South Eastern Education and Library Board,
 WA19, WA29
 Special Education Needs Figures, WA217
 Special Needs Education Expenditure, WA197–8
 Spending on Publicity and Advertising, WA218
 Sports Grounds, WA114
 St Colman's College, WA16
 St Mary's Primary School and St Patrick's
 College in Banbridge, WA312
 Staff Absence, WA30–2
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA32
 Stress-Related Illness, WA120
 Sure Start Programme, WA32, WA116, WA199
 Suspension of Children, WA208

Teachers, WA300–1
 Teaching Jobs, WA303
 Teaching Posts, WA24–5
 Teaching Staff, WA115
 Townland Names, WA16
 Transferors Representative Council, WA26
 Transferred Redundancies, WA207
 Travel Time to Schools, WA311
 Ulster Scots Drama, WA18
 Vacancy Control Policy, WA23
 Vetting Systems, WA19
 Victoria School, Ballyhalbert, WA204
 Violence in Schools, WA203
 Voltage Power Lines, WA200
 Welfare Officers, WA24
 Work from Home, WA119
 Youth Club Leaders in the Foyle
 Constituency, WA315
 Youth Workers, WA115, WA202–3, WA29

Savage, Mr G

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development
 All-Ireland Food Exhibition, 224
 Assembly Chamber: Refurbishment, 39
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Departmental Websites, WA185–6
 Flood Protection, WA9
 Rivers Agency, WA8
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA10
 Work from Home, WA109
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Department Websites, WA112
 Work from Home, WA14
 Education
 Department Websites, WA207
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA32
 Work from Home, WA119
 Employment and Learning
 Department Websites, WA223
 Media Monitoring Expenditures, WA224
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA121
 Work from Home, WA122
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Department Websites, WA228
 Gas Prices, WA40
 Locally Produced Food, WA38
 Northern Ireland Produce, WA37, WA38
 Staff Working from Home, WA42
 Environment
 Department Websites, WA243
 Media Monitoring, WA245
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA47
 Work from Home, WA49
 Finance and Personnel
 Department Websites, WA247
 Expenditure on Consultants, WA133
 Local Produce, WA58

Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA356
 Staff Working from Home, WA55
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Department Websites, WA260
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA78
 Work from Home, WA260
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Assembly Questions, WA1
 Department Websites, WA177
 Funding for Victims of Terrorist Violence,
 WA175–6
 Work from Home, WA106
 Regional Development
 Department Websites, WA270
 Staff Disciplinary Procedures, WA91
 Work from Home, WA149
 Social Development
 Departmental Websites, WA281
 NI Housing Executive, WA280
 Work from Home, WA167

Shannon, Mr J

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 240–2
 Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 330–1

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 Consideration Stage, 121, 121–2
 Further Consideration Stage, 198, 198–9, 199
 Final Stage, 254, 257, 258

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 180

Ministerial Statement

Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
 Ireland, 7
 North/South Ministerial Council — Animal
 Health, Plant Health, Common Agricultural
 Policy and Rural Development, 251–2

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Support Structure for Museums, 340
 Education
 Paedophile Information Exchange, 348
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 MiddleStep Services, 146
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Commissioner for Older People, 24
 Consultation, 25
 OFMDFM: Staff with Disabilities, 218
 Regional Development
 Free Travel: Delay, 149
 Tubber Road, Kircubbin, 152
 Social Development
 Community Development for Minority Ethnic
 Groups, 156, 156–7

Private Members' Business

- Access to Health Service Dental Treatment, 101
- Reclassification of Cannabis, 362, 364–5
- Review of Business Bureaucracy, 13–14, 14
- Sustainable Energy, 301, 302–3

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Tuberculosis Outbreaks, WA293
 - Water Levels in Clea Lakes, WA189

Culture, Arts and Leisure

- Armagh Observatory, WA13
- Arts Council Funding, WA297, WA298
- Castle Gardens Primary School, WA298
- Museums Council, WA196
- Translating Correspondence, WA11
- Trip to Texas, WA11
- Ulster-Scots Cultural Office, WA13
- Ulster-Scots Cultural Tourism, WA13

Education

- Education Targets, WA204
- Glastry School, WA25
- Irish Language Officer, WA204
- Killard Special School, WA119
- Millisle Primary School, WA198
- Movilla High School, WA26
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs, WA306–7
- School Principal Appointments, WA204
- School Uniforms, WA203
- Sports Grounds, WA114
- Ulster Scots Drama, WA18
- Victoria School, Ballyhalbert, WA204

Employment and Learning

- Educational Targets, WA221
- Occupational Therapy Course, WA121–2
- South Eastern Regional College, WA333

Environment

- Ards and Down Area Plan, WA349
- Bin Collection, WA49
- Bin Fine Policy, WA130
- Building Sites, WA126
- Compost Collection Service, WA47
- Department Wages, WA44
- Grouse Population, WA245, WA246
- Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences, WA350
- Planning Applications, WA47, WA130, WA246
- Planning Service Recruitment, WA246
- Recycling Targets, WA48
- Scottish Marine Bill, WA241
- Seaweed in Ards Peninsula, WA244, WA245
- Sick Leave, WA46
- Strangford Lough, WA350–1

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Ards Hospital Minor Injuries Unit, WA60
- Attempted Suicide Aftercare, WA252
- Attempted Suicide Hospital Admissions, WA252
- Internet Content, WA252
- Local Commissioning Groups, WA260

Malnutrition Statistics, WA262

Medical Secretaries, WA62

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, WA268

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Causes of Poverty, WA285

Child Poverty Strategy 2020, WA176

Children in Severe Poverty, WA173

Paramilitary Flags, WA107

Planning Appeals Commission, WA5

Regional Development

Frances Street, Newtownards, WA88

Meeting Times, WA153

Northern Ireland Water, WA151

People with Disabilities, WA150

Public Road Maintenance, WA269

Road Accidents, WA86

Road Safety, WA86

Tarmacking of Roads, WA272

Ticketing System, WA150

Traffic Calming Measures at Movilla Road, Newtownards, WA92

Water Supply, WA153

Social Development

Hostel Accommodation in Newtownards, WA384

Housing Executive Tenants, WA384

Housing Executive's Maintenance Budget, WA386

Replacement Grants, WA385

Simpson, Mr D

Executive Committee Business

- Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
- Final Stage, 264

Oral Answers

Finance and Personnel

Bullying and Sexual Harassment, 35

Private Members' Business

- Review of Business Bureaucracy, 12–13

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Arts Council Funding, WA293

Education

Education Sector Employees, WA307

Independent Admission Exams, WA330

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Lough Neagh Partnership, WA231

St Patrick's Day Celebrations, WA349

Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, WA231

Tourism, WA240

Tourist Board Promotion, WA232

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Domestic Violence, WA74

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Civic Forum, WA286

Drumcree/Garvaghy Road, WA182–3
Regional Development
A3 Road from Portadown, WA156
Blue Badges for the Disabled, WA379
Disabled Parking, WA151, WA274
Parking Tickets, WA274
Social Development
Town Centres, WA169
Travellers' Sites, WA164
Urban Regeneration, WA164

Speaker (Mr W Hay)

Assembly Business, 1, 119
Committee Business
Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm, 319, 321
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123,
124, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 138, 142,
162, 163, 165, 169, 170, 175, 175, 176, 177
Libraries Bill
Consideration Stage, 177
Further Consideration Stage, 318
Public Health (Amendment) Bill
Royal Assent, 119
Matters of the Day
Death of Robert Dunlop, 317
Ministerial Statement
Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern
Ireland, 1, 4, 5
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Multi-Sports Stadium, 342
Sporting Excellence, 338
Education
Dundonald High School, 351
European Language Portfolio, 349
Selection at Age 14, 353
South Eastern Education and Library Board, 353
Employment and Learning
Stranmillis University College: Merger, 345
Social Development
Shared Future Housing, 158
Private Members' Business
Death of Raymond McCord Jnr, 18, 20, 21, 23
Extended Schools Funding, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377
Review of Business Bureaucracy, 9, 11
Speaker's Business, 119

Spratt, Mr J

Adjournment
Regeneration of the Sandy Row area in South
Belfast, 112–13
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 129, 129–30, 163, 167
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 196–7, 197

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Consideration Stage, 59
Oral Answers
Education
Dundonald High School, 350
Environment
Planning Circular PC 03/07, 31
Regional Development
Bus Lanes, 152
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 381
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Proposed Merger, WA35–6, WA36
Stranmillis University College, WA35
Environment
Driver Vehicle Testing Agency, WA244, WA245
Driving Instructor Identification, WA244–5
Foreign Road Users, WA44
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
General Practitioner Surgery, WA59
Graduate Dentists, WA73
Regional Development
Parking Schemes, WA155
Parking Tickets, WA86
Social Development
Annadale Flats Improvement Scheme, WA97
Housing Executive, WA97

Storey, Mr M

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 236, 236–7
Committee Stage
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS23, CS34
Executive Committee Business
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Consideration Stage, 165
Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 263
Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
Further Consideration Stage, 188
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Language Issues, 339
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
North Belfast: Conflict Resolution, 217
Regional Development
Free Travel: Delay, 150
Private Members' Business
Extended Schools Funding, 371, 374, 375, 376, 380
Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South
Tyrone, 292, 295, 295–6, 296
Post-Primary Transfer, 276, 276–7, 277, 283

Written Answers

Education

Assembly Questions, WA117
Educational Welfare Officers, WA24
Irish Books, WA24
Sex Education, WA18
Teaching Posts, WA24
Teaching Staff, WA114

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Departmental Land, WA347

Environment

Driving Licences, WA47

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Clostridium Difficile, WA369
Dental Service, WA364
Fire and Rescue Appliances, WA143
Fire Service Appliances, WA146
Fire Stations, WA142
Parental Disciplining, WA73

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Post-Primary Transfer, WA105

Regional Development

Ambulance Travel, WA90
Traffic Calming Measures, WA375
Water and Roads Service, WA373

Social Development

Community Support Programme, WA383
Housing Associations, WA165
Housing Executive, WA165, WA166
Housing Executive Expenditure, WA102
Social Security Agency, WA103
Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA171

Weir, Mr P

Committee Business

Education and the Economy, 236, 236–7

Committee Stage

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA 11/07], CS3, CS19, CS20, CS28–9, CS29, CS41–2

Executive Committee Business

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
Final Stage, 265

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill
Second Stage, 386–7, 387–8

Libraries Bill

Consideration Stage, 180–1, 181

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Consideration Stage, 51, 53, 54, 54–5, 55, 55–6, 56, 62, 64, 69–70, 70, 74, 74–5, 75–6, 76, 79, 81, 82, 86, 86–7

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Further Consideration Stage, 185, 188, 188–9, 189–90, 192

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Final Stage, 205, 208, 209, 209–10, 210, 210–11, 212–13

Oral Answers

Education

School Crossing, 351

Employment and Learning

University Capacity and Student Demand, 343

Environment

Dangerous Wild Animals, 29

Local Councils: Litter Prevention, 33

Private Members' Business

Aggregates Mapping Programme, 108–9

Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 287

Post-Primary Transfer, 276, 276–7

Reclassification of Cannabis, 358

Review of Business Bureaucracy, 14

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Departmental Land, WA10

Assembly Commission

Desks for Back-Bench MLAs, WA389

Events Held at Parliament Buildings, WA392

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Pigeon Racing, WA300

Rebuilt Library in Bangor, WA297

Sale of Department Land, WA193

Education

Children Statemented, WA18–19, WA29

Children with English as an Additional Language, WA220

Conlig Primary School, WA16

Departmental Land, WA199

Donaghadee High School, WA302

Interactive Whiteboards, WA208

Nursery School Places in Bangor, WA318

Nursery School Places in Donaghadee and Millisle, WA317–18

Nursery School Places in Holywood, WA317

Post-Primary Pupil Figures, WA220

Primary School Figures, WA221

Primary School Pupil Figures, WA214

School Crossing Patrol Officers, WA17

Secondary School Pupil Figures, WA214, WA215, WA216

South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA29

Special Education Needs Figures, WA217

Special Needs Education Expenditure, WA197

Youth Workers, WA202

Employment and Learning

College Merger, WA121

Departmental Land, WA122

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Departmental Land, WA124

Economically Inactive, WA40

Employment Figures, WA347

Growth in Industry Sectors, WA233

Industry Sector Employment, WA233

Long-Term Unemployment Figures, WA232

Renewable Energy, WA347, WA348

Environment

- Departmental Land, WA48
- Leylandii Hedges, WA45
- Planning Applications, WA44
- Tree Preservation Orders, WA48

Finance and Personnel

- Departmental Land, WA133
- Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA57

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Community Psychiatric Nurses, WA73
- Dental Service, WA361
- Departmental Land, WA134
- Free Personal Care, WA144
- Hospitals: Capital Expenditure, WA251
- Service Framework Development, WA262

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Departmental Land, WA3

Regional Development

- Departmental Land, WA89
- Disabled Parking, WA278
- Independent Review of Water and Sewerage Services, WA94
- North Down Borough Council Area, WA153
- Rail Services, WA279
- Traffic Calming Measures in North Down, WA370
- Ulsterbus, WA376
- Water and Roads Service, WA277, WA278
- Water Meters, WA376
- Water Preservation, WA154

Social Development

- Departmental Land, WA381
- Energy Performance Certificates, WA97
- Housing Executive, WA98
- Incapacity Benefit, WA100
- Youth Workers, WA159

Wells, Mr J

Ministerial Statement

- Way Ahead for the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland, 6

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Animal Cruelty, WA9
 - Farm on Ballyrone Road, Katesbridge, WA288
- Assembly Commission
 - New Search Facility, WA284
 - Union Flag, WA171
 - Yellow Pages, WA283
- Education
 - Down High School in Downpatrick, WA313
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Thompson Solutions, WA39

Environment

- Planning Applications, WA45, WA240, WA244
- Planning Legislation, WA126
- Planning Service, WA45
- Reform of Planning System, WA243–4
- Tree Preservation Orders, WA45, WA46, WA126

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Accident and Emergency Ambulances, WA363
- Accident and Emergency Vehicles, WA62, WA67, WA69
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, WA267
- Number of Ambulances, WA65
- Sun Bed Regulations, WA363

Regional Development

- Car Clubs, WA93
- Independent Water Review Panel, WA94
- Thompson Solutions, WA151

Social Development

- Wood Pellet Boilers, WA167

Wilson, Mr B

Executive Committee Business

- Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 - Final Stage, 206–7, 207, 207–8, 208, 208–9

Private Members' Business

- Sustainable Energy, 307–8

Written Answers

- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Environment and Renewable Energy Fund, WA36
 - Pump Water Storage System at Camlough, WA229
- Environment
 - Reduction of Councils, WA241
 - Redundancies and Pension Rights, WA241
- Regional Development
 - Land Abandonment, WA91
 - Sale of Land, WA91
 - Springhill Shopping Centre, WA91, WA92

Wilson, Mr S

Executive Committee Business

- Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill
 - Final Stage, 258, 258–9, 259, 259–60, 260, 260–1, 261, 262, 263
- Local Government (Boundaries) Bill
 - Final Stage, 211

Private Members' Business

- Irish-Medium Schools in Dungannon/South Tyrone, 287
- Post-Primary Transfer, 272, 274–5, 284

Written Answers

- Education
 - Extended Schools Programme, WA300
 - Irish-Medium Schools, WA17
 - Primary and Post-Primary School Absences, WA313, WA314

Employment and Learning
Undergraduate Drop-Out Cost, WA32
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Domestic Tourism, WA228
Renewable Energy Targets, WA225
Visitors to Northern Ireland, WA227, WA228
Wind Turbines, WA225
Environment
Renewable Energy Developments, WA129
Wind Turbines, WA129
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
NHS Dental Services, WA75, WA76
Office of the First Minister and deputy First
Minister
Planning Appeals Commission, WA4
Regional Development
Senior SmartPass Holders, WA90

**Wilson, Mr S (as Chairperson of the Committee for
Education)**

Committee Business
Education and the Economy, 232–3, 234

PART III (STRANGERS' INDEX)

**Christie, Professor Sue (Northern Ireland
Environment Link)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS27–28, CS28, CS29, CS29–30,
CS30, CS31, CS31–2, CS32

Colvin, Mr Robert (Craigavon Borough Council)

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS28, CS29, CS30–1, CS31, CS32

**Committee Clerk (of the Committee for Social
Development)**

Committee Stage

Charities Bill [NIA 9/07], CS25

**Everall, Mr Paul (Local Authority Building
Control)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS1–3, CS3, CS4, CS4–5, CS5, CS5–6,
CS6–7, CS7, CS8, CS8–9, CS9

**Hagan, Mrs Hilda (Department of Finance and
Personnel)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS34, CS34–5, CS35, CS37, CS38,
CS42, CS47, CS47–8, CS48

**McCrystal, Mr Seamus (Department of Finance
and Personnel)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS33, CS34, CS35, CS35–6, CS36,
CS36–7, CS37, CS38, CS41, CS42, CS43,
CS43–4, CS44, CS44–5, CS45, CS45–6, CS46,
CS46–7, CS47, CS48, CS49, CS50, CS50–1

**McKibben, Mr G (Department of Finance and
Personnel)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS34, CS36, CS41, CS42

**Neary, Ms Sarah (Department of the Environment,
Heritage and Local Government)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS18–19, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS22,
CS23, CS23–4, CS24

**O'Grady, Mr Chris (Department of the
Environment, Heritage and Local Government)**

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS17–18, CS20, CS21, CS22, CS22–
23, CS23, CS24

Williams, Mr Noel (Energy Saving Trust)

Committee Stage

Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill [NIA
11/07], CS11, CS11–12, CS12–13, CS13–14,
CS14, CS14–15, CS15, CS15–16, CS16

